CHILDREN'S BOOK
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LOS ANGELES

MAGGIE IN HER NEW HOUSE.

MEGGIE

OF "THE PINES."

BY

AUNT FRIENDLY.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

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MEGGIE OF "THE PINES."

I.

The Promised Friend.

PICTURE yourself in the midst of a tall forest, and you will stand where Meggie Blake found herself, when our story begins. Meggie was not at the "far west," but in New Jersey, one of the old thirteen states, yet she stood among pine trees tall as the masts of ships, and the dark forest stretched round her for many a mile. All was silence but the solemn murmur of the wind that moaned and sighed among the branches.

It was a dreary, solitary place, yet Meggie Blake felt neither sad nor lonely. Her home had always been in "The Pines," as that part of New Jersey is called, and she would

have thought a crowded city, or even a country village, a place of far more danger.

We spoke of Meggie's home. Now you must not fancy a neat cottage, with its flower-garden in front, and its well-worked vegetable-patch in the rear. Meggie knew nothing of carpets or white curtains,—even a clean, scoured floor would have been a novelty to her.

Leaning against an old pine tree there was a queer little building, a sort of hut or shanty, made of roughly cut slabs, and put together more as if it were meant for a child's play-house than for a real home. Yet there Meggie had been born, and there she had lived until she was ten years old, as well contented with that rude dwelling as was the neighboring squirrel in his snug quarters, or the birds in their pretty nests.

Now that you know something about Meggie's home, her appearance will not surprise you.

Meggie wore no bonnet. A bonnet! she never had one in her life! She was not afraid

of sun or rain! When the drops fell fast on her brown skin, she but laughed the louder; when her dark hair fluttered and floated in the wind, she left the breezes to arrange it as they liked, and thought it no concern of hers.

Meggie was barefoot, of course, and her short, faded calico dress plainly told that she was a tearer rather than a mender, a stainer rather than a washer.

Meg was quite a curiosity to persons only accustomed to civilized regions and a decent way of life,—and as great a curiosity to Meg was a well-dressed stranger. She never failed to favor such a rare visitor with a long, curious stare of her great black eyes, and to keep her gaze fixed upon him while there was a shadow of him to be seen.

Meg had been looking at a fox-trap that her father had set, about a mile from his house. The cunning creatures had been shy of the trap that night, and Meg was going home with no good news to tell. She was in no hurry; nobody was waiting for her; no-

body would have wondered or cared if she had staid out all day. Meg's mother seemed to think, as soon as her children were able to run on their two feet, that they were as able to take care of themselves as the fawns or the foxes. Young animals, they were to her, to be turned out to have their own way, excepting when they interfered with her, and that she could make them understand by a sudden blow, quite as well as by much talking.

A half a dozen there were of them,—a dirty, quarrelsome, mischievous set,—wonderfully wise, though, in some ways. They early learned to make their own living, after their own fashion. The squirrels and quails they killed were beyond all account; the fish they caught would make a city boy open his eyes with wonder. Those six children could pick more blackberries in a morning, than any other six Pine Rats in all that region. "Pine Rats!" yes, that is the unattractive name by which such people as Meg and her family are known all over New Jersey.

"Pine Rats!" as if there were any human beings so low and degraded as not to be far, far above any poor brute of them all! Wild, neglected, ignorant and wicked those savage people may be, but they are yet human beings, with immortal souls, though to those souls they give hardly a passing thought.

Meg, as we have said, had been on a morning visit to the fox-trap. As she wound her way homeward, she amused herself with throwing bits of sticks or stones at the birds that crossed her path, and she had already a couple of fat robins in her hand, as a proof of the good aim she could take. Meg was about to aim at another, when, in the stillness, a new, far-distant sound broke upon her ear.

Meg hid herself at once; why, she could hardly have told. Behind an old pine she stood, while her head was bent forward, and every feature gave sign that she was eagerly listening.

Meg's post of observation was near a road —if road it could be called. There was a

cleared way through the trees, along which at rare intervals a coal-wagon rolled over the carpet of dry pine leaves, or a horse's hoofs were marked, as some curious stranger passed that way.

Meg knew at once that no coal-wagon was now to leave its ruts on that lonely road. The step was of a single horse, and that the light movement of a spirited animal,—not the slow plunge of some old drudge of the plough. As the new-comer drew near, Meg's curiosity brought her fairly from her hiding-place. The horse started aside at the wild figure, and Meg's wilder laugh did not tend to increase his composure. The gentle but commanding voice of the rider soon put the well-trained animal at ease, and he stood quite still, as he was reined up, near the spot where Meg was standing.

Meg put on her most saucy air, and prepared to answer in her own style such questions as strangers generally put to "Pine Rats" in their short, passing interviews.

Meg had certainly done her part to keep

up the unfavorable character usually given to the people of that region.

"How far is it to the nearest house, my little girl?" said the stranger, with a pleasant smile.

"That's accordin' to the way you takes," said Meg, with a sly look out of the corner of her eye.

"Where does this road lead to?" continued the stranger.

"It don't lead nowhere; it kinder winds round," said Meg, with the same provoking mischief in her eyes.

"Can you tell me in what direction I shall find the old Iron Furnace?" was the next question.

"Just a piece from the master's chicken roost!" said Meg, with a knowing look, and a laugh which seemed to say she was more familiar with night pilfering than with daily labor.

The stranger alighted, and fastened his horse to a tree.

Meg thought this proceeding rather alarm-

ing, and made off as fast as her feet could carry her. Her hint about the chicken-roost might have been taken in earnest, and she would be safer out of harm's way.

The stranger did not appear to notice her sudden flight. He settled himself comfortably among the roots of the tree, and seemed preparing to make himself quite at home.

He looked around him at first, in apparent enjoyment of the scene before him. A soft brown carpet was stretching away on all sides, through which scarcely a plant or shrub ventured to peer up from the ground below, save where, now and then, the adventurous winter-green sent up its slender stems, and showed its bright berries among the glossy leaves. Above, the dark pines were waving, with their solemn moan, while their tall bare trunks rose one after another like the still forms of some great multitude of giants, fixed as they had stood, in one mighty gathering.

Presently the stranger's eyes fell: he drew

from his pocket a book, and was soon poring over its pages.

Meg had not gone so far as to lose one of the invader's movements. She watched him closely, and was convinced, at last, that he had no idea of pursuing her and bringing her to justice.

Roughly as she had answered him, she had yet been charmed by his pleasant voice and kindly manner. She wanted to hear him speak again, she wanted another of his bright smiles. She was curious to know why he was stopping there, and what he was doing with that book, that seemed to please him so well.

Stealthily she crept towards him. He heard her coming, but he did not raise his eyes. From between the leaves of his book he took a picture, on a loose piece of paper. He held it a moment in his hand against the wind, until it was full as a little sail, and then he let it float away on the gentle breeze. It fluttered, and turned a few sharp summersaults, then fell a few yards from his

feet, yet he did not follow it with his eyes, that were still bent on his book. Meg watched him an instant, then gave a sudden hop and captured the treasure. Then came a second flight on her part, with no pursuit, as before. Meg looked at her treasure. It was a beautiful thing, a splendid thing to her. A bright gilt border was all round the little sheet; then there was a picture, gay with brilliant color, and below were irregular lines—"Reading, I 'spose," said Meg, as she looked at the lines, after a thorough study of the picture.

The "reading" gave her but a moment's thought, but at the picture she looked again and again. A man, with a face full of kindness, and a form of wonderful dignity, was standing in the midst of a group of little children. Some were clinging about his knees, one favored little one was nestled in his arms, and tenderly he bent his face towards it.

Meg looked, and smiled, and talked to herself, and as she did so, she moved slowly

towards the stranger. When she was near him again, he rolled an apple to her feet,—and looking up, said, "That's for you ; come, don't be afraid of me. I want to tell you about the picture."

"Are all them his?" said Meg, pointing first at the children, and then at the kind friend among them.

"Come here by me, and I will tell you all about it," said the stranger.

Meg approached, carefully keeping, however, at arm's-length from the new comer.

"Now, what shall I call you?" he began. "I must know your name before I begin to talk to you."

"I'm Meg," was the short reply.

"Well, Meg, a long, long time ago there was a person who had a great deal sweeter and kinder face than that you see in the picture. Nobody could paint such a beautiful, good, loving look as he had. He was very wise, too ; he knew more than any man ever did. When he walked out, people used to follow him, to hear the wonderful words

he said, and to see the great things he could do. That wise, loving person was named Jesus—Jesus Christ. He loved little children, he let them follow him, he spoke kindly to them, he took them up in his arms. No matter how poor and weak they were, he loved them. When they had no friends, he was their friend. He gave them what they asked for, and was interested in all they had to say.—He does not live in this world now."

Here Meg's face looked very sorrowful, but it brightened as the stranger went on.

"He lives in Heaven now, but he loves little children just as well. He sees them all the time, and knows just what they are thinking and doing and saying. He likes to be the friend of children. If they speak to him, he can hear them, though they cannot see him. He wants children to be good and kind, and he will teach them how, if they will ask him."

Meg had listened, with her round eyes full of wondering interest. No one before

had ever taken pains to please her, no one had ever spent five minutes in trying to teach or interest her. Very beautiful this wonderful story seemed to her. Very kind she thought it for that stranger to talk so long and so pleasantly to her. He had not made fun of her; he had not called her a "Pine Rat." She was ready to trust him as a friend. He was silent for a moment,—then he said,—

"Meg, I have been telling you about Jesus Christ, the Son of God; did you ever hear of him before?"

"I never!" said Meg, in a half exclamation.

"Would you like to have Jesus for your friend?" asked the stranger.

"He wouldn't be a friend to me!" said Meg, doubtfully.

"No matter what you have done, no matter who you are, he wants to be your friend. Won't you let me teach you what to say to him, so you can talk to him when you are here in the woods, and want to speak to somebody? You are never alone, he is always

with you. Won't you let me teach you what to say to him?"

"What shall I say?" said Meg, curiously.

"Say "Lord Jesus, please make me thy child. Teach me how to love thee, and be like thee!" said the stranger, in a low, earnest voice. "Repeat that after me."

Meg did so, twice, three, four, even a dozen times. Meg was new at learning, but her heart was in her task, and her unskilful memory at length caught the short prayer.

"Now I must leave you, Meg," said the stranger, kindly, "but don't forget to say that often, every day, and Jesus will hear you, and you will find him a true friend. Perhaps we shall meet some time in a beautiful world, where we shall see Jesus, and have no more pain and sorrow. Good-bye, Meg; may God bless you, and lead you to him!"

The stranger mounted his horse, while Meg stood watching him, in perfect silence. At length she broke forth: "I like you. I mean to do as you say." Here she repeated the prayer slowly, and then added, "I'll

have that friend. I want to see you again. Stop, stop! I'll tell you the way to the furnace and the big house."

Meg's directions were so long, and so complicated, that the stranger had to take out his pencil and note them down from her lips. He had no fear of being led astray; he could trust the young face that looked up so earnestly towards him.

"Thank you, Meg," he said, as he wrote the last word. "You have helped me. You have been kind to me. That is your first beginning to be like Jesus. Speak to him as I have taught you, and do what you know to be right. I believe we shall meet again in the beautiful country where Jesus lives."

Meg's sorrow at losing her new friend, changed into a glow of brightness, as he spoke these parting words. His confident manner affected her, and she repeated her prayer again and again, with the belief that it was heard, and that the Jesus of the "better country" was to be one day her well-known friend.

And had not the stranger reason for his confident hope that he should meet in the "happy land" that stray child of the wilderness?

He had stopped by the way-side to scatter good seed; he could leave it to the Lord of the harvest, sure that it would spring and be watered, and in due time bear its precious fruit.

His humble endeavor had been made in prayer and faith. Was he not right in believing that prayer would call down a blessing, and faith have its reward in the future welfare of that little one for whom Christ died?

II.

Meggie's Hope.

THE time that the stranger had passed so leisurely at the roadside, was precious time to him. He had come to "The Pines" on business of importance, and every moment was of value; but he could not, for the sake of worldly gain, lose an opportunity of doing work for his Master. Gladly would he have lingered to tell Meggie the whole story of our Saviour's life and sufferings, but that was impossible for him: he could but cast a little light on her darkened mind, and go his way, trusting her to the Heavenly Father, and remembering her in his prayers.

Meggie did not soon forget that stranger. Often she looked up and down that lonely wood, hoping to see that well-remembered figure, or to hear the quick sound of his horse's step.

The weeks went by, and the stranger came no more. In a far-distant city he was busy and useful, but he had not forgotten his visit to "The Pines"—he had not forgotten little Meggie. He might not see her again on earth, but he might hope and pray to meet her in Heaven.

Meggie's little card was very dear to her. As she looked at it, the stranger's words seemed ringing in her ears. That Jesus who once loved little children was still living and loving, though she could not see him. The kind traveller came no more, but Jesus was always with her. This thought had become a very pleasant one to Meggie. Often, very often, as she wandered in the woods, she repeated her simple prayer, and smiled at the thought that some one was listening, though all was stillness around her.

You must not think that Meggie had become very good, suddenly. Even children who have Christian parents, and ministers, and Bibles, and Sunday-schools, cannot at once break up old bad habits, and cure old faults. It takes

but a moment to cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "Lord, save me, or I perish!" We may believe that Christ has saved us, and resolve to follow him; but this is only the beginning of the business of our life. Without such a beginning there is no happiness, no safety for us; but after that must come the long, patient effort to do the will of God in small things and great, to deny ourselves, to be patient, thankful, loving.

Poor Meggie! It was a mercy she did not see herself exactly as she was. She might have given up in despair, if she had fully realized what a wild, wicked little creature was Meggie Blake.

Meggie's ideas of right and wrong were very indistinct. She had never heard the Ten Commandments. No one had taught her that she should love God above all things, and her neighbor as herself, yet Meg had her own views of duty. She was fully convinced that robbing hen-roosts was not an occupation of which the traveller would approve, and she was sure that it would not be easy

to speak to Jesus, when she was employed in such a manner. Fighting with her brothers and sisters, too, she determined to give up, though it was by no means an easy matter. She did not think Jesus would like that, though she could hardly tell why.

As to quarrelling and disobedience, idleness and evil-speaking, Meggie had not learned to consider them as sins. She kept away from the house as much as possible, now, and was happiest when she was wandering in the woods, and saying over the words the traveller had taught her.

Sometimes, in the moaning of the winds, she fancied that she heard Jesus speaking to her, answering the prayers she made to him. It is not so that Jesus answers our prayers, yet He hears our lowest whispers; he can read the secret wishes of our hearts. Meg longed to hear something more about Jesus. She, by chance, heard her father use that name one day. "Do you know him, father?" she exclaimed; "do you know Jesus?"

The rough man, who had but spoken an idle oath, started, and stared at his child. Then followed a wild, bitter laugh, as he answered: "Such things ain't for 'Pine Rats;' they don't suit our ways."

Slowly it became the chief desire of Meggie's heart to know more of Jesus, to find some one who would teach her about him; but disappointment seemed to await her.

A merry party of young sportsmen passed along the wood where Meg was so frequently watching. They stopped to ask their way. She answered them truthfully, and then held up her card, saying, "See what a gentleman gave me! He sat down here and teached me about it."

"We'll teach you something that suits you better," was the reply; and then they began a foolish song, made up at the moment, about "Pine Rats," and their doings.

Meggie turned away, and was followed by a shout and a halloo, as the sportsmen rode off. Yet those young men had lived among a Christian people; they knew the Way of

Life, though they would not follow it. Had they reason for their contempt for Meggie of "The Pines?"

Meg was, at least, in earnest. She had given up what she knew to be wrong; she eagerly desired to be led in the right path.

Curiosity was a natural trait with Meggie, though she had little upon which to exercise it, in her wild home. She knew the hiding-place of every squirrel around her father's hovel. She knew where the robins built, and how many eggs the quail would lay in her nest. She had scoured the forest for miles, and could tell every flower and shrub that she found in her wanderings. She had studied nature with her curious eyes, and had learned much that would fill a city child with wonder.

Meg's curiosity mingled with the desire of her heart to know more of Jesus. She had heard but a part of the truth,—she yearned to know the rest.

The seat which the traveller had occupied among the roots of the old pine, had become

a favorite with Meggie. She was established there one morning, with her pet fox at her side, when she saw a heavily loaded wagon coming down the road. The wagon was piled with planks, and Meg's curiosity was at once awakened to know whither they were to be carried. She determined to find out in her own way. She did not wait to be addressed, this time. Hailing the wagoner, she said, "I say, Mr., gie me a ride?"

"We hain't had many passengers to-day; you can ride a piece if you like," said the man, with a laugh. The fact was, he was tired of the lonely way, and was glad to have anybody to talk to.

He found Meg a very lively companion. She had narratives to tell of the deer that roamed the wide forest, and hid where "Pine Rats" alone could find them. She had seen a snake as long as a man, and she laughed as the driver shuddered at the thought of meeting with such an acquaintance.

"You'll have smart trotters if you make

your way back," said the man, after Meggie had been riding with him for several miles.

"I don't make nothin' of walkin'," said Meg; "I'm used to it, you see."

If the wagoner had driven five miles more, Meg would have stayed with him. She was determined to see where he was bound, and when she had once made up her mind it was hard to turn her.

"Here, where this tree is chopped off, I was to turn in," said the man, meditatively.

"My!" said Meg, in astonishment.

A few rods from the road there was a cleared spot, and there, plainly marked out, were the outlines of a small dwelling.

Meg's eyes glistened. Here was something worth knowing.

That was not Meg's last ride with the wagoner. Day after day saw her perched on a stump or a pile of boards, as she watched the erection of a one-story frame house, containing only two rooms. The work went on like magic. There was no lack of men or tools.

In a white tent the men slept and ate, and when their work was over, the woods rang with their songs. Meg hoped that they would tell her something of Jesus. The name of God they sometimes uttered, but even Meg understood that was no sign that Jesus was their friend. They spoke that name as her father did—as do the wicked, whose end is bitterness.

Perchance among those many workmen there may have been one who loved his Saviour, and was trying to follow him. It may have been so, but no one thought to teach that lonely child of the wilderness about the Lord Jesus coming to "seek and to save them that are lost." Ah! if every Christian mechanic, if every Christian workman were true to his Master's cause, what a different world this would be. Then we should have missionaries everywhere. He who goes out for his daily work, would then be going about, too, to set a faithful example, and to watch for an opportunity to lead some one to the feet of Jesus.

There are those who, like Meggie, are looking for a kind hand to point them to the right way. There are those who are going down deep, deep into wickedness, because those who know Jesus will not tell them of this Heavenly Friend, and teach them to love him.

Little children! show in your lives how good, happy and loving they are who follow Jesus. Little children! never lose an opportunity to give a good book or a wise word, that may lead the wicked and ignorant to our Saviour.

There were many workmen to laugh at Meggie's pert answers, and odd, wild ways. There were some, even, who were fond of the little girl, who was ready to fetch water from the spring, or try her hand at cooking for the men. Meg had made friends for herself among the strangers, but no one spoke to her of Jesus.

Sometimes a tall old gentleman rode about among the workmen, and gave them directions. He had a smile always for Meggie,

and learned to look for her on her perch, curled up on the stump of a fallen pine. He knew her name, and had often a cake or a handful of nuts for her; he liked to see her face brighten as he drew near. The old gentleman had been a Christian for more than twenty years, yet it did not strike him that here was a child, a stranger to Christ, whom he might take by the hand and lead to his loving Master. Ah! he *did not think of it!* The good that we have left undone,—is that laid up against us, as well as our broken resolutions and our evil doings? Will the voice of the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," to him who has passed among the ignorant and wicked without one gentle effort to turn them from the paths of sin?

The rude laugh of the sportsmen had kept Meggie from asking about Jesus, yet she had not forgotten the promised Friend: to him she daily spoke her little prayer, and daily she tried in her poor way to be better.

III.

The Little Box.

THE new house in "The Pines" was at length finished. Meggie's eyes opened wide with wonder and admiration as she saw real carpets laid down on the floor of the two small rooms. Each simple article of furniture was handled and admired by the curious Meggie. That neat home seemed to her a perfect paradise, and the two white tents that were pitched near it had wonderful charms for her simple eyes.

It is not to be supposed that Meggie had seen all these preparations going on without asking what they were for. No, no; she might be trusted for finding out what she wanted to know, by hook or by crook. Why, she knew the old gentleman's name as well as she did her own father's! She was sure

to say out plainly "Mr. Ellsworth," when he spoke to her, that she might show she was no stranger to him. She knew this house was being built for his only daughter, and that Miss Annie Ellsworth was to come down there as soon as it was done, to stay two whole months, and perhaps longer.

Miss Annie Ellsworth,—how much she was in Meggie's thoughts! How Meggie wondered what she would be like, how she would speak, what she would wear! Meggie had seen gentlemen often, strangers visiting "The Pines," but a real lady she had never chanced to look upon. Meggie had a kind of an idea that Miss Annie Ellsworth would not be much like Sally Blake, her own mother, or any of her acquaintances; but imagination failed her, when she attempted to picture to herself the coming occupant of the new dwelling.

You may be sure that Meggie was at her post on the pine stump, on the day when she knew Miss Annie was expected. Yes, she saw with her own eyes the real shining car-

riage, with glass windows, that stopped at the door of the low building.

No young, light-footed girl sprang from the carriage door and exclaimed with delight at the pleasant home provided for her, there in the woods!

Mr. Ellsworth stepped out first, and then almost lifted down a slender lady, whose pale cheek drooped on his shoulder.

Sickness was a thing of which Meggie knew little. She was accustomed to tanned and sun-browned faces; but such a fair, delicate countenance, she had never before beheld.

Meggie found her eyes suddenly full of tears, but she wiped them away quickly, that she might not lose one item of what was going on before her. Through the open window Meggie saw Miss Annie tenderly laid on the pure white bed, and then the stout, elderly woman who was with her dropped the curtain, and Meggie was shut out.

Meggie lingered about until she saw Mr.

Ellsworth, the hale old man, enter his tent,—then she felt privileged to draw near to its open door. She watched him taking out his well-cleaned rifle from its velvet case. How curious to her were the separate pieces, and the little boxes, each fitting so nicely in its oddly-shaped home.

Mr. Ellsworth smiled, as Meggie's eyes showed her interest in his proceedings, and he began to talk to her in his usual pleasant way. "There has somebody come, now, who wants to see you," he began.

"See me!" said Meggie, in surprise.

"Yes, my Annie, Miss Annie Ellsworth, wants to see you. I have told her about you, and you must come and see her to-morrow, when she is rested, after her journey."

"Oh, my eye!" exclaimed Meggie, in joyful surprise; "I won't miss, I tell you. But ain't she—ain't she kinder weak like?" said Meggie, finding difficulty in expressing herself.

"We hope the air of 'The Pines' will cure her," said Mr. Ellsworth, trying to speak

cheerfully, though a shadow passed over his face.

"Will you please, sir, step this way a moment," said the man who had driven the party to their home in the Pines, and who was now about to return to civilized regions.

Mr. Ellsworth rose suddenly, and followed the speaker.

There, spread out before Meggie, was the rifle-case, with all its wonders. An open box of percussion-caps lay near her. She knew well their use. She had seen her father shooting with his old long gun too often, not to know how to prize those wonderful caps. Money, money, that rare article in the Pines, she knew had to be paid for them in the distant town. Here was a chance of getting them without any such trouble!

Meggie had been taught to steal ever since she could remember—taught in a way that seldom fails—by the constant example of her parents and all the "Pine Rats" of her acquaintance.

Her father, Billy Blake, was a thief by trade, if he had any trade at all. In some lonely place in the Pines he cut down the trees that belonged to some far-distant owner. There he laid log upon log, in a way he knew well, till he had built a great pile, with an opening in the centre for a chimney. Then he covered the pile with turf, set fire to it, nearly closed the opening, and Billy Blake's coal-*pit* was at work.

Poor Billy Blake! his heart was as black as his face,—the wicked, thieving charcoal-maker and charcoal-seller!

Meg was used to stealing; it did not take her long to make up her mind about the percussion-caps. Before Mr. Ellsworth returned to the tent Meg had disappeared, and the little paper box had gone too.

Mr. Ellsworth missed it at once, and, with an exclamation of impatience, he made up his mind that Meggie was not to be allowed to lurk about his forest home, to pilfer and steal, and be the pest of the whole establishment.

Mr. Ellsworth did not stop to think whether Meg had ever been taught the eighth commandment, or whether it was not his duty to try to reform the wild, ignorant child, before he drove her back to her miserable home and ways of sin. Mr. Ellsworth was too much out of patience to think of any such considerations. He had fancied the child, and had spoken pleasantly to her, and now he felt disappointed and deceived,—as if he had had any reason to expect better things of neglected little Meggie!

She, meanwhile, was taking a short cut through the forest, towards her father's rude hut. She clasped the little box tight in her hand; it had a particular value for her that day. She knew her father was expected home from one of his rare trips to town. He had gone out of the forest with a heaping load of charcoal, in the great rickety wagon, that certain Pine Rats owned in common. He would be sure to come back with a bottle in his pocket, a bottle of fire-water, and Meg well knew what scenes would then take place

in her wretched home. She thought the timely present of the percussion-caps might put her in special favor, and so save her from her share of the harsh words, and harsher blows, which would be freely dealt out. With a kind of glee at her good luck, Meggie pushed her way through a part of the forest where the underbrush was thick and tangled. She was not afraid of tears or scratches; she feared them as little as did the partridges that whirred past her, out on their own errands.

Meg stopped to survey a small, open, swampy spot, where wild cranberry vines grew. There was to be a good harvest this year, she was sure; and she laughed to herself at the thought of the basketful of the red fruit that she would send to market, by the time the products of her father's next charcoal pit were ready for sale.

A stranger would have hesitated to follow Meggie along the wild path she had chosen; she did not even stop a moment to think, when she came to a spot where a single slen-

der pine trunk was thrown across a narrow ravine, where a brook went its own wild way. Meggie's bare feet stepped fearlessly across the trembling bridge, that shook even beneath her slight weight.

She had the little box fast in her hand, and was hastening on to hide it where she could bring it out to soften Billy Blake's angry tones.

She struck at last the road towards which she had been making her way. She struck it at a point never to be forgotten. There, under that tall pine, the stranger had sat,—that stranger who had spoken so kindly. Meggie's little card, and the Friend to whom she had learned to speak when alone in the forest, were recalled to her mind. So far she had gone on even without the feeling of guilt,—so accustomed had she been to ways of evil; but her pleasure in the small box in her hand was now at an end.

She hid it, truly, where no eye could see it, but she felt that she could not hide herself from the eye of the Friend, who, she had

been told, was ever with her. Poor Meggie! That was a long, miserable day to her. On one thing she resolved at last. She would not even tell her father of what she had taken. She would not let him know where those bright little treasures were hidden. In this way she tried to satisfy her conscience.

Billy Blake's return home was too wretched, too miserable a scene to be described here. Happy are those children who have never seen a human being made fierce as a wild beast, by intoxicating drinks! Happy the children who have never heard human lips utter words of wickedness and blasphemy, only fit for the mouths of Satan and his angels! Thank God for your pure, peaceful homes, ye little ones! and pray for those who from infancy see sin in its worst horrors.

Meggie's day of unhappiness was closed by such an evening of terror and danger as can only come where God is forgotten, and his commandments despised.

IV.

The Midnight Walk.

OUTSIDE the wretched hovel which was her home, sat Meggie Blake, at midnight. She had fled from the wildness of her father's drunken madness. Cowering in the shelter of a pine tree, crouched Meggie. Her heart was full of bitterness. The sweet consciousness of a Heavenly Friend, that had of late so consoled her, was gone. Hidden under a stone, not far from her feet, was the little box that her hands had stolen from one who had spoken to her in kindness. Meggie thought that was the cause of all her trouble. It struck her that, if that were once safe with its owner, she should be happy in the midst of her trials.

Her resolution was taken. Faster than she had hurried homeward with that stolen

treasure, she now hastened to restore it. The moonlight peered down through the tall pines, and lighted Meggie on her way. The gentle deer cast their dark shadows, and a distant bear growled out on the night. Even of the wild beasts Meggie had no fear ; yet her heart was full of terror, and her feet trembled as on she sped.

Children who have been early taught to love God, the Father of spirits, and the Ruler of all things visible and invisible, can know little of Meggie's fears. To her ill-taught mind the woods were full of evil beings, and dangers threatened her that made her blood creep and chill.

A less resolute spirit than Meggie's would have given up in fright and despair, before her long midnight walk was over.

At last she stood in the little clearing, where the white tents gleamed out in the moonlight, and the single low building was wrapped in silence.

Meggie stole towards Mr. Ellsworth's tent. She quietly raised the canvass-door to slip

under it the box that had caused her so much pain. There he would find it on awakening, she fancied, and never know how it was restored to him.

Hardly had she touched the canvass, when there was a loud angry growl, and in another second she was held down firmly by strong paws, while the sharp teeth that fastened upon her dress, grazed her back as they took their hold.

Meggie screamed in terror, such screams as can only come when the whole soul is filled with fear.

A moment passes, and then Mr. Ellsworth's hand was on the poor crouching child, as he drove back the great dog who had acted so well as watchman.

"You child!" said Mr. Ellsworth, in angry astonishment, "so young, yet so wicked! I wonder Hero did not kill you outright! Surely, such a dog is better than such a child!"

Mr. Ellsworth placed Meggie on a chair, and proceeded to bind her fast. "I dare not

trust you to find your way to your wretched home, after this. Hero would never let you leave this spot alone. Here you must stay till the morning."

Meggie sat in sulky silence, and Mr. Ellsworth lay down on his cot, but not to sleep. To let that child grow up in her wicked ways seemed to him like helping to train her up to sin; but what could be done? How should he punish her? Would he not be in danger of bringing down upon himself the anger of the Pine Rats, and so risking his daughter's safety in that wild place?

Meggie's meditations were all confusion. Right and wrong were so mixed in her darkened mind, that there was now little there but a feeling of dread and discomfort.

Sleep at length came to the tired child, and her head drooped upon the table at her side.

Sleep came to the troubled old man, too, on his cot, but Hero's eyes did not close, and his low growl, from time to time, showed the vigilance of the faithful watcher.

V.

The Judge.

MR. ELLSWORTH'S efforts in the morning were vain in inducing Meggie to say one word to him about her midnight visit to his tent. She maintained a sullen silence, even when accused of having taken from the rifle-case the little box, the day before.

That box was safe in Meggie's bosom. She had made up her mind that, say what they would to her, she would not give it up.

"My daughter, Miss Annie Ellsworth, wants to see you, my poor child," said Mr. Ellsworth, when he came out from breakfast. Hero, who had been on guard during the absence of his master, now seemed to understand that his duties were over, yet he followed, as the old gentleman led Meggie towards the small dwelling.

Lying on a couch in the neat breakfast-room, was Annie Ellsworth. Surely Meggie need not have trembled at being brought into the presence of such a judge. There was love and mildness in her quiet blue eye. There was peace and tenderness in every line of her pale, delicate face. Meggie hung back as Mr. Ellsworth opened the door, but a sweet voice said, "Come in, Meggie."

The child looked up in wonder. Mr. Ellsworth left the room, and Meggie stood alone in the middle of the floor.

A fair, thin hand beckoned her towards the couch, while in the most gentle and loving of tones, the invalid said, "Come near to me, my dear; it tires me to speak very loud."

Meggie was beside the couch in a moment. The sullen look in her face had given way to pleased astonishment.

"Draw up that little foot-stool and sit near me," said Miss Annie. "I want to talk to you, Meggie. I am glad Hero did not

hurt you. You must have been terribly frightened, when his sharp teeth were so near you."

"I was scared to death!" burst forth Meggie, her natural manner suddenly returning to her.

"He is a good dog, and we all love him dearly. He saved my life once, when I was a child!" said Miss Annie.

Meggie was all attention, as the speaker went on.

"My brother and I were playing on the river bank, and I reached too far over, to pick a flower that grew on a steep place. I fell in. Down I sank in the deep water. My little brother was all alone. He screamed for help, but no one came. He saw my dress come up to the top of the water, and then sink, as he thought, for ever. He never expected to see me again. Just then Hero came bounding towards him. My brother pointed to the water, and Hero plunged in. He pulled out the poor little dripping, drowning girl, and swam with her

safe to the shore. Do you wonder that I love Hero?"

"He's the right sort of a dog!" said Meggie, warmly.

"Yes. Hero wants to take good care of us all, and when he saw little Meggie creeping into my father's tent at night, he was afraid she was going to do mischief," said Miss Annie, gently. "What was this little girl going to do there? You need not be afraid to tell me, my child."

Meggie looked for a moment into the kind, mild eye, that was bent inquiringly upon her, and then she said, doubtfully,—

"You wouldn't take me in, on the sly?"

"You can trust me, Meggie; no harm shall come to you!" was the reply.

Meggie put her hand to her bosom, and taking out the little box, held it before Miss Annie's face, as she said,—

"I wanted to put this ere back. I—I—"

"You did not want to keep what was not yours?" said Miss Annie, a bright light shining in her clear eyes. "That was right,

Meggie. You took it, but could not be happy. Something whispered to you to put it safely where it belonged; so you came in the night, when no one could see you, and you thought you would never be found out."

"Who told you about it?" said Meggie, opening her eyes in wonder.

"Nobody told me about it, Meggie; but I understand it very well. I know that no one is happy who is doing wrong. Dear little Meggie, I want to teach you to be a good girl; I want to love you, and be kind to you."

Meggie stepped towards Miss Annie, and looked eagerly into her face, to see if she could be in earnest. Miss Annie went on,—

"I want to tell you about the Lord Jesus—"

"Will you tell me about him?" interrupted Meggie, her whole countenance lighted up with joyful surprise.

"Then you have heard of him," said Miss Annie, rising on her couch, in her anxiety to hear the reply.

"Yes, yes, and this is what I say to him," said Meg, repeating slowly, "'Lord Jesus, please make me thy child. Teach me how to love thee and be like thee.' A good stranger told me to say that."

Tears were flowing fast from Miss Annie's eyes. Here was a poor child of the wilderness, who had had but a glimpse of Jesus in his loveliness, and would draw near to him. In her wickedness and her ignorance, Meggie yet clung to her little hold upon the truth, and yearned for more.

To the present Saviour, Annie Ellsworth spoke in her heart. She thanked him for his mercy, already shown to poor Meggie, and prayed to be enabled to guide her into a full knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

"Meggie," she said, after a moment's pause, "tell me all you know of the dear Lord Jesus, our best Friend."

Meggie stood up, and in her own peculiar way, gave a rapid account of her interview with the stranger. His earnest words she

repeated in the rude language of "The Pines," but their spirit was not lost. She had taken hold of the idea of Jesus, as an ever-present, loving Friend, who would have all his children to do right. The treasured picture, soiled and worn, Meggie had carried everywhere with her. She now produced it, and, pointing to the central figure in the group, she said, "There he is—that 's his picture!"

"It was the thought of him that made you bring back the little box, was it not, Meggie?" said Miss Annie, in her gentle way.

"Yes, yes, I kinder thought he'd took his pleasant look off from me, after I did that; and things got worse at our folkses, and so I was just a sneakin' it in, when the dog cotched me."

"You were right, Meggie; Jesus does not look pleasantly on any one who steals, even the smallest thing. If you want him for your Friend, you must never take anything which does not belong to you."

"No, I won't never again!" said Meggie, very slowly.

"Let us ask Jesus to help you to keep that promise!" said Miss Annie. "Kneel down here, by my side, while I speak to him."

Meggie did as she was told, and kept her eyes open, looking eagerly about her, as if she expected to see Jesus appearing while Miss Annie was talking to him.

Meggie did not see Jesus with her outward eyes, but she felt in her heart that he was there, present and listening, as Annie Ellsworth prayed to him to watch over the soul of the poor ignorant child, to keep her from evil, and help her to know Christ as the only friend and refuge of sinners.

When Miss Annie had motioned Meggie to rise from her knees, there were a few moments of solemn silence. Then Annie took up a book that lay near her, and said, "This is the Bible, Meggie; did you ever hear of the Bible?"

Meggie shook her head doubtfully, and said, "May-be!"

"The Bible is the book that God has given us to teach us about him. It tells us all

about Jesus, and explains to us just what we ought to do. Then it tells us of the beautiful, happy home that we shall have forever, if we love Jesus," said Miss Annie.

Meggie looked at her book with curious interest, and ventured to touch it with the tips of her fingers. "I can't read," she said, dolorously.

"I will read to you a little in the Bible every day, and will tell you all I know about Jesus. You shall come to see me, and we will talk about him, and speak to him together," said Miss Annie; and as she spoke, she looked on Meggie with eyes full of loving interest.

Meggie sat down suddenly on the floor, and her tears fell fast.

"I thought—I thought—" she said, sobbing, "you'd nabbed me, and would lock me up, and be hard on me, but you've took me right the other way, and I can't stand it—I can't. It does me over," and Meggie's tears fell afresh.

"Dear Meggie, don't cry," said Miss Annie,

tenderly. "I know you did very wrong, but I am sorry for you, and want to help you to be better. Will you come every day to see me?"

"Now, just as if I wouldn't!" exclaimed Meggie, dashing away her tears and springing up.

A sudden fit of coughing seized Miss Annie, and in a moment Mr. Ellsworth, and Mrs. Brooks, the middle-aged woman, were in the room.

"You have tired yourself out, Annie," said her kind father, in a tone of tender reproach.

"She'd better go," said Mrs. Brooks, looking disapprovingly at Meggie. "Hero 'll look after her."

The dog had been a silent witness of the scene in his mistress' room, but when his name was spoken, he fastened his eye on Meggie, as if he felt her under his special charge. Meggie did not seem inclined to trust herself to Hero's guardianship. She stood with her eyes anxiously fixed on Miss

Annie, as if she feared her new teacher was suddenly to pass from her view.

When, after a few moments of severe coughing, Annie sank back upon her pillow, Meggie burst forth, "Her 's better now! Don't do that way, again!"

There was so much of hearty interest in Meggie's words and manner, that Mr. Ellsworth looked at her with pleased surprise, and suffered her to remain on the low seat where she took her place, watching the invalid with loving glances. Soon Annie's eyes opened, and a sweet smile passed over her face, as she said,—"I am better, now, dear father!"

"You must keep quiet, my darling; I will sit here and read," said Mr. Ellsworth, taking a newspaper from his pocket, while Meggie edged her stool a little nearer to the couch.

A half-hour passed, and then Mr. Ellsworth and his daughter fell into conversation: "What shall I do with our prisoner?" he said, at length.

"She is my little friend, and I will take charge of her, father. She is sorry she took your box. She was coming to return it when Hero seized her. Here it is!" was the daughter's reply.

"You always find good where no one else would think of looking for it, Annie!" said the father, warmly. "Well, Meg, you concluded thieving was a bad business!" he added, turning to the child; "be sure you have done with it."

"I never mean to take nothing no more!" said Meg, solemnly.

"Then you may go," said Mr. Ellsworth; "and I hope you will keep out of mischief for the future."

Meg looked doubtfully at Hero. Annie called the dog to her side. He came at once and laid his shaggy black head close against her white hand, speaking his love as best he could.

"Hero!" said Annie. He looked up as if all attention. "Good Meggie! good Meggie!" Annie repeated several times, kindly

patting Meggie's brown arm,—"Good Meggie!"

The dog seemed at once to understand what was meant, and did not offer to follow the child as she moved towards the door.

"Come to-morrow, Meggie, and make yourself look as neatly as you can," said Annie, as she smiled her good-bye. Meggie bowed, and disappeared in silence, but her parting look was full of grateful love.

VI.

The Second Visit.

SALLY BLAKE was not much in the habit of inquiring as to Meg's way of life, but her late long and frequent absences were beginning to excite attention.

"Where are you going to-day?" asked Sally, as Meg was starting off on her promised visit to Miss Annie.

"I'm going to the new house!" said Meg, hurrying away to be spared further questioning.

"The new house, indeed!" said Sally, pursuing, and laying her hand on Meg's shoulder. "To the new house!" echoed half a dozen young voices, as all the little Blakes clustered to be present, if there was to be an angry discussion.

"Yes, to the new house! the lady asked

me to come to-day," said Meggie, with an important air.

"A pretty figure you cut, to be goin' to see ladies!" said Sally, with a hoarse laugh.

"I'm goin, too!" said Jim Blake, a rough-looking boy of twelve. "And I!" "and I!" repeated all the little crew.

Meggie set off at a full run, hoping thus to escape her escort. If she was familiar with the rough ways of "The Pines," so were they. They could run across tottering logs and through brambles as well as she; and when she stopped at last, to take breath, her pursuers were close upon her. Even the youngest, Stubby Blake, a club-footed boy, hardly four years old, was in sight, though not quite able to keep up with the rest.

Meg was now near a brook. Giving up, in despair, all prospect of being left to the acceptance of her invitation alone, she proceeded to make her toilet after her own fashion. She stooped down beside the stream, and gave her face such a thorough purification as it had not had for many a day.

The little Blakes, as they came up, hallooing, followed her example, as if that were a part of the ceremony of going to the "new house," as Mr. Ellsworth's settlement was called, in "The Pines." Even Stubby Blake, when he arrived, all panting, made awkward efforts to stoop down and wash as the rest had done; he but fell in the mud, and rendered still more unattractive the short frock, which had been his overall for days innumerable.

A wild shout followed Stubby's misfortune, which he resented by a deluge of tears, and such a roar as made the woods ring.

"See! see Meggie!" said the older sister, a little touched by Stubby's distress.

Meg unrolled a little bundle she had in her hand. It was several yards of new calico that her father had bought during his late visit to the city, among other contributions to materials of the family wardrobe. Meg proceeded to rap the gay calico round her, so as to hide, as far as possible, her soiled and tattered dress; and when she had

done, she was assured of Stubby's approbation, by his exclamation, "You're a one! go it, Meg!"

"Ill fix it for you!" said Jim; and again Meggie had to use her swift feet to keep her strange attire from being torn away by her brother's rough hand.

With disordered hair, heated and out of breath, Meg arrived at the new house. The whole little band were hallooing at her heels, and such a clamor as rose in that solitude, startled Mrs. Brooks, so that she rushed to the door, in affright.

"I've come!" said Meg, jumping in, and shutting the door triumphantly behind her. A howl of rage and disappointment rose from the little Blakes, who, after pelting the house with dirt for a few moments, scattered to survey the premises.

Miss Annie was sitting up in an easy-chair, when Meggie so suddenly burst in upon her.

"What is the matter, Meggie?" said the invalid, in her own calm, unruffled way.

"They would come, them Blakes—the 'Pine Rats!'" said Meggie, contemptuously.

"Who are they?" asked Annie, in wonder.

"Why, brother Jim, and Sal, and Kit, and Mol, and Stubby. I wouldn't a minded Stubby—I takes him with me, sometimes."

"Your brothers and sisters!" said Annie, with a smile and a sigh.—Poor Meggie! It was plain that she as yet knew but little of the spirit of the gospel, the law of love! What patience, what love, what faith would be needed, ere that child of the wilderness could be trained to the meekness and gentleness of Christ!

This Annie felt in her inmost heart, and it was not without prayer that she commenced the instructions of the morning.

"Meggie," she began, "how are you different from the foxes, and deer, and bears, and all the other animals in 'The Pines?'"

Meggie stared for a moment in silence, and then said: "I stands up when I walks, and I knows a heap more than them does."

"What do you know more than they do?" continued Annie.

Meg thought for a few moments, but was puzzled for a reply. She felt within herself a something superior to the brutes, but, alas! the life she had led had had little higher aim, or higher happiness, than that of the wild creatures who had been her companions.

"You are right, Meggie; you do know more than any animal. You have something in you that makes you different from them. The great God who made you meant you to be better and wiser than any beast. He gave you a soul, that can think, and feel, and love. When your body is laid in the ground, your soul will live forever. Your soul cannot die. It is your soul that Jesus loves. It is your soul that wants to know about him. It is your soul that I want you to learn to care for, and to teach to be good."

Meggie listened very earnestly, and Annie went on:

"Every man, woman and child in the

world has a soul. All our souls are bad, unless Jesus makes them good."

"You hain't got a bad soul, like me," broke in Meggie.

"Yes, I have," said Annie, quietly. "There is nothing good in me but what Jesus has put there."

"Could he make me like you?" said Meggie, earnestly.

"He could make your soul better than mine, if he pleased. He can make us both perfectly good when we have done with this world," said Annie, earnestly.

"I should love to be like you," said Meggie, thoughtfully; "but I would not want to be so weak like, and cough the way you did yesterday."

"I am very happy," said Annie; and the bright smile that passed over her face proved the truth of her words.

"You might die sometime, you might, when you are took so!" said Meggie, with her eyes fixed on Miss Annie's pale face.

"Then I should go to be with Jesus, where

there is no more pain, and no more wickedness, and no more sorrow," was the calm reply.

"Can't you get there without dying?" said Meggie, with an expression of great disappointment. "He didn't tell me that."

"No, Meggie, we can't see Jesus and his beautiful home, unless we die first. These poor bodies are not fit for heaven; we must leave them behind us when we go to him. He will give us a body such as he has—a better body than we have now," said Annie, her face glowing with interest. "Every one will be pure and perfect there. There will be no anger or badness there."

"I kinder think they would not let me in," said Meggie, sorrowfully. "I ain't like as you tell they are there."

"I am not fit to go there. Nobody in this world is good enough to go there. That is what brought the dear Lord Jesus to this world. He came here and showed us how we ought to live, and then he died for us, that, if we love him and trust him, all our

bad ways may be forgiven, and we may go to heaven, to be with him," said Annie.

"Did he die on purpose? Didn't he have to?" asked Meggie, eagerly.

"He gave himself up to a cruel death for us. He so loved us that he was willing to suffer and die for us," was the reply.

"I couldn't die for nobody!" exclaimed Meggie, thoughtfully.

"No," said Annie. "No, Meggie; but you can love the Lord Jesus, who has done so much for you, and try to trust in him, and be like him."

"I will! I will!" said Meggie, earnestly, and again she repeated her little prayer: "Lord Jesus, please make me thy child. Teach me how to love thee, and to be like thee!"

Often as she had spoken these words, never had they so come from the depths of her heart. Annie knew that was real prayer, and she joined in it with the full faith of her soul.

Is there a "little one," for whom Christ

died, who will not say that prayer? Is there a child, who has heard of Jesus, who does not wish to love him, and be like him?

Meggie's eyes glistened as Annie took the Bible in her hands, and read to her, now of Jesus blessing little children, now of the healing of the blind man by the way side, now of the Crucified praying for his murderers.

As Annie read, she from time to time looked up to say: "He is here, Meggie, that Jesus of whom I am reading," until, in that small room, the young teacher and the humble child felt themselves fully in the presence of the blessed Saviour.

Such a meeting with Christ the Lord must have its holy influence, its power to purify and exalt.

VII.

Stubby Blake.

THE quiet in Annie's room was broken in upon by a terrible disturbance without. The air was full of wild shrieks, and loud, angry words, and bitter oaths, mingled in the tumult. Above all was heard Mr. Ellsworth's voice, in a tone of command. Annie forgot her weakness, and hurried to the door of her little dwelling, while Meggie darted past her and was in a moment in the midst of the excited circle.

In a fury, Jim Blake was trying to strike Hero with a heavy stick, while Mr. Ellsworth held him back, at the same time bidding Hero drop the victim he had seized upon.

Hero's teeth were fast in Stubby Blake's clothes, not sparing the flesh below, and in his anger the dog shook the screaming child

as if he had been a fox or a weasel. The shower of stones that fell around him, the occasional blows that Jim succeeded in giving him, and even his master's voice, failed to make Hero quit his hold. Annie stepped at once to the side of the excited animal. She stooped and laid her hand on the child, and said in a low, firm tone, "Hero! off! off!" The dog's teeth loosened their grasp, and the child fell into the lap of his deliverer. She could not stop to soothe him, or to examine his wounds, for the children rushed upon the dog, who, with wide mouth, prepared to return their assault. Annie seized him by the collar, and led him, growling, into the small dwelling. Hero's gentle mistress could command his obedience when all else failed to subdue him. When he was once safely locked into his prison, Annie returned to the scene without.

Meggie had the screaming boy in her arms, and was vainly trying to quiet him, while the other children stood round her, uttering their threats of vengeance.

Annie's fair hand loosened the child's dress, and examined his wounds. She found his flesh but grazed, yet even the slight scratch was painful, and Stubby's screams increased as he saw the blood upon the handkerchief which Annie applied to the wound.

"Annie, my child! the boy is not hurt," exclaimed Mr. Ellsworth. "You must not wear yourself out over the little rascal. We had had a good hunt, Hero and I, and he was excited when he bounded towards the clearing. He found the whole set of these little scamps in my tent, making free with whatever they chose. He seized on this little chap, as the nearest, and he had to suffer for the sins of the whole party. He has got off pretty well, considering the circumstances. Go to your room, Annie! You owe it to me. I have come here for your health, with much trouble and expense, and I cannot see all the good neutralized by your interest in these miserable children. Go, Annie dear; I will see that we have no more such intruders here."

"Let me have Meggie!" said Annie, pleadingly.

"Yes, Meggie, if you choose; if she can come without bringing this troop down upon us. She must come alone, if she comes at all. Now go, Annie," said the father.

Mrs. Brooks, who had not lost any of the proceedings, now put her arm round the trembling, exhausted girl, and led her away, but not until Annie had whispered, "You must come, Meggie dear; I cannot give you up."

Mr. Ellsworth made short work of dismissing the boisterous little party, and strengthened his advice as to their keeping clear of his premises, by free promises of jails and close confinement for any who should be found thieving or prowling round that spot again.

Stubby found himself well able to walk as soon as his fright was over, and he stumped away at as fast a pace as the rest. Meggie followed, thoroughly disheartened. How was she to grow like Jesus, in the midst of

such a family as hers! She thought it quite impossible that he could care for any of that miserable set, excepting the unfortunate Stubby, for whom she had herself a shadow of tender, sisterly feeling.

VIII.

An Acted Lesson.

BILLY BLAKE had killed a deer, and there was feasting in his poor hovel. Was it to prepare a choice morsel of the juicy meat, that Sally was concocting that stew with such especial care? There was no lack of herbs, truly, but they were such herbs as have a savor of death. Sally had not ranged the woods without learning to know where the poison vines grew rank and full of venom. She could tell where there were berries that the boldest dare not taste. Now every evil plant had lent its juices for the wretched mixture she was so carefully preparing.

Meggie looked on in silence. She knew it was vain to question her mother in such a mood; the answer would come, not in

loud words, but in a silent, well-aimed blow.

Meggie was seized with a horrible fear. What if this destroying mixture were to find its way to the new house! She had heard threats of vengeance from Billy Blake and his wife, as they listened to the exaggerated story the children had given of the attack upon Stubby, and of Mr. Ellsworth's angry dismissal of the whole party.

Meggie was desperate, but she thought of a resource in her time of need. She remembered the all-powerful Friend, whose eyes are in every place, and she dared to ask him in her own words to watch over Miss Annie, and keep her from evil.

It was with trembling anxiety that Meggie sought the new house, on the morrow. She was to be present at a scene of mourning. She was to behold sorrow,—yet her dear friend was safe. Miss Annie was there, though her eyes were wet with tears. She had lost something that she loved, though it was but a poor, dumb animal.

Hero's dark form lay stretched upon the ground. He would gambol no more at his master's side, nor return his mistress' fond caress. Sally Blake had flavored the venison too well; too skilful had been her poison mixture!

Meg felt inclined to shrink away, as if guilty herself of the deed, when she saw the family gathered round the lifeless creature; but Annie spied her, and called her to her side.

"We don't suspect you, Meggie," she whispered; "I am sure you wouldn't do such a thing. But we shall miss poor Hero, sadly; I really loved him."

"You don't think hard of me, then?" said Meggie. "I couldn't help it—indeed I couldn't!"

Meggie looked on in silence, while poor Hero was laid in the ground, and a new tie bound her to Annie Ellsworth. She saw how really her friend was tried, and yet she could treat her with kindness—even her, who was in some measure the cause of the trouble.

Mr. Ellsworth was full of anger at the wrong which had been done him, but Annie laid her hand gently on his arm, and said, "We must forgive our enemies, father! These poor people are almost in heathen darkness. Perhaps we are sent here on purpose to set them an example of love and kindliness. Perhaps we may at least win one soul here for our Master!" and Annie looked lovingly at poor little Meggie, who felt herself in a very unpleasant predicament.

"You are right, Annie," said Mr. Ellsworth, in a softened tone. "You are quite right; Heaven help me to follow your example!"

"Meggie's ear was doubly open that day to hear of the love and forgiveness through Jesus. She was beginning to understand what it was to have a Christian spirit. Beginning, we say, but her eyes actually filled with tears, and her heart was full of wonder, at the parting words of Miss Annie, when their long interview was over.

Mrs. Brooks had filled a basket, at Annie's

request. Tea, sugar, coffee, and several neat garments for children were nicely packed within it, as Meggie well knew, for her envious eyes had watched each parcel as it went in. Great was her surprise, therefore, when Annie handed her the basket and said, "Take this to your mother, Meggie. Tell her we want to be kind neighbors, and that I should be pleased to come and see her myself."

"But—but—" said Meggie, hesitatingly, "you don't know about the dog!"

"I think I understand all about poor Hero," said Annie, gently, "but our Saviour's rule is, Return good for evil. I forgive your mother, and would gladly be her friend."

That acted lesson took deep hold of Meggie's mind, and even Sally Blake felt its force.

There was no more pilfering about the new house. Meggie often went home with well-filled baskets on her arm, but they had been packed by loving hands, and freely

given by a loving heart. Grateful as Meggie learned to be for such favors, she was still more grateful for the better treasures that were daily made hers from the storehouse of God's precious Word.

IX.

The Stray Lamb.

THE air of "The Pines," so frequently recommended for consumptive patients, seemed to have a healing power for Annie Ellsworth. Her cough no longer made her father start and sigh, and her step daily grew more free and firm.

A brightness dawned on those solitudes for Mr. Ellsworth, as he saw his dear daughter's cheek grow less pale, and he flattered himself that her disease was checked at last.

Annie smiled, as she saw the hope that was cheering him, and strove to make him happy for the present hour. On the future she did not care to dwell. She knew herself to be in a loving, Almighty hand, and she was ready to live, and be useful, or to suffer, die, and be glorified, as pleased him

best. Blessed are they to whom death has lost its terrors, and life is but a willing service of a beloved Master!

Annie was quite at home in "The Pines" now. She had been there two whole months. In the low buggy, with her father at her side, she had explored its wild, winding roads, and found out every sunny opening, for miles around her forest home.

In these drives Meggie was the guide, and the ever attentive scholar. While she pointed the way where roads crossed, and sudden turns were to be made to avoid fallen trees or running streams, she herself was learning more surely the "strait path" to the heavenly country.

Meggie had been as truly a stranger to the Christian religion as if she had been born in a heathen land. Slowly she learned of the great Being who is the God and Creator of the universe. Slowly she understood his pure and perfect law. She heard the commandments, and she saw before her an example of one who, though but a mere

human being, could be gentle under provocation, patient under pain, and joyous in the prospect of death.

Meggie felt more and more the depth of her own wickedness, as she caught the spirit of the gospel's law of holiness in the heart and life. As she watched Annie, refined, tender, loving and prayerful, Maggie seemed to herself almost a creature of a different nature.

Then, indeed, Meggie began to "hunger and thirst after righteousness." With all the strength of her strong will she resolved to keep the commandments of God, and to be like her Christian friend.

To the observing Annie, Meg's progress in self-government, and in the knowledge of heavenly things, was wonderful. When in the presence of her kind adviser, Meg felt herself in an atmosphere favorable to everything that was good. She could not give a harsh answer to one who spoke so gently. She could not deceive one who so trusted her. She could not be angry with one who

gave her no provocation. But at her own home Meg was quite another person. In the midst of the old temptations that thronged there, Meggie did not seem much like a Christian. True, she was far different from what she had been—less wild, passionate, selfish, and idle. Her mother saw that some change had come over Meg ; her brothers and sisters saw it, and somehow felt that Meggie was gaining a power over them that they did not understand. Others could see that Meg was improved ; but she was growing discouraged. As firmly and desperately as she would have fought a bear, she was struggling against her faults, determined to triumph. She meant to be sweet, gentle, and kind, like Miss Annie. Day after day this was her aim, and at evening she had to remember coarse, angry words, spoken in a moment of sudden excitement. She had to see herself a wild, wayward child, with a sinful heart.

For weeks Meggie had kept on with this struggle, determined to triumph. Of her

resolutions and her discouragements she said nothing to Annie Ellsworth, and to the young teacher all seemed to be going well.

Annie was surprised, one morning, not to see Meggie appearing for her usual daily visit. The pelting rains of midsummer, or the scorching heat, had not kept her away; yet now, on a bright, clear autumnal day, she was not to be seen bounding towards the new house, with a glad smile on her face. Annie looked out for her all day, and Mr. Ellsworth was amused to see how much of the pleasure of the drive was gone to Annie, now that her little pet was not near her.

Another day came, and brought no Meggie. As Mr. Ellsworth gently helped Annie into the buggy, she said: "Father, I want to go to Billy Blake's. I am afraid Meggie is sick."

"I'll ride over this afternoon, and inquire," said Mr. Ellsworth. "I do not like to have you go to such a place. You cannot tell upon what terrible scene you may

come. You have hardly any idea of the roughness and wickedness of these people."

"Father, I want to go. I want to know about Meggie at once. I am very anxious about her. I am not afraid of anything I shall see. I am not better than our Saviour, who mingled with the worst of sinners. Do let me go!"

Mr. Ellsworth reluctantly consented, and turned the head of the steady horse towards the road leading through the forest to Billy Blake's distant dwelling.

Vague images of trouble floated through Annie's mind, on the drive, but she banished them, and found relief in prayer for Meggie, as a sure safeguard for her, whatever might be her present trial.

It was a rare thing for wheels to be heard along the forest path that led to Billy Blake's dwelling, and Sally started up, as if on guard, at the unwonted sound. Near the hovel an iron pot was supported, gipsy fashion, on two forked sticks driven firmly into the ground, while below, a fire was blazing. A group of

ragged children were feeding the flames with pine cones, while Sally was preparing a half-dozen quails for a plunge in the pot. The handfuls of feathers that she threw, now on this side, now on that, fluttered in the wind, and then sank to the ground to mingle with the rest of the miserable litter scattered about that home of carelessness and dirt.

Sally started up, as we have said, and as she stood with the half-stripped birds in her hand she made a strange picture.

It was Sally's favorite boast, that she was the only woman in "The Pines" who would have dared to marry Billy Blake, for she was strong enough to be a match for him, drunk or sober.

Those brawny arms, that tall, sturdy figure, told indeed of a strength not common even among women who have lived like men in the open air, and in the midst of exposure. Sally's brown stuff dress clung close to her person, and was drawn up almost to her knees, as she stretched herself to her full height, and turned to look defiance at the intruders.

A single glance told her who they must be, and with a swing of her arms she dispersed the children, bidding them "begone, for such 'Pine Rats' were not fit to see ladies." Sally seemed to have no doubt of her own fitness to see and talk to anybody. She did not wait to let the strangers drive fairly up to her dwelling. She saw the horse start and begin to back at the sight of the fire, and she sprang towards him, and took him by the head, as she asked, in her own loud, coarse tones, "What might the lady be wanting?"

"I have brought some fruit for the children," said Annie, handing out a pine-apple and some oranges. "I thought these might be a treat to them."

"Too good for 'em! Too good for 'em!" said Sally, as she took the offered gift, not, however, without a half-smile of pleasure.

"Where's Meggie?" inquired Annie, anxiously. "I've not seen her for two days."

"She's took quare. I kinder think she ain't right!" said Sally, putting her hand significantly to her head.

"Where is she?" said Annie, with eagerness, and stirring as if she was going to alight. "Is she in bed?"

"La! no!" said Sally, with a rough laugh. "I don't know where she is, nor ain't like to till she gets beat out, and comes home for her victuals."

"She went down there, and Stubby he followed her," said Mol, putting her frowzly head out from behind the hovel.

"Thank you! thank you!" said Annie, in her gentlest manner. "There seems to be a sort of a road that way; can we drive in that direction, Sally?"

"I suppose folks can go till they gets upsot; nothin' else need stop 'em!" said Sally.

Annie looked doubtingly at her father, fearing that he would refuse to go on, on such a recommendation. Mr. Ellsworth needed no urging; he now for the first time felt how much poor Meggie had grown in his affections. He must see her, and know what was the matter.

The road proved by no means a difficult

one. The true danger lay, in Sally's mind, in the fact that it ended at a certain unlawful clearing, three miles away, where Billy Blake had a sly coal-pit of his own. Billy's secret was safe, for that day at least. Before the clearing was reached Annie caught the sound of a child's voice, in clamorous weeping, and in the distance she saw Stubby Blake sitting on a fallen pine, twisting his fingers into his eyes, and screaming as loud as his strong lungs would let him.

Mr. Ellsworth dismounted at once, and, fastening his horse, helped Annie over the uneven ground until they stood close beside the boy, whose eyes were too full of fists and tears to see anybody coming. As to his hearing footsteps, that was quite impossible, when his own screams were in his ears.

Annie laid her hand on his shoulder—"Stubby! Stubby!" she said, "what is the matter? Where's Meggie?"

"Her won't stop! Her cries, and I mean to!" said Stubby, carrying out his threat, in a deafening roar.

Annie, meanwhile, followed the direction in which he had pointed, as he spoke the emphatic "*her*."

Meggie was literally rolling on the ground in an agony of tears.

"Meggie, my dear child," said Annie, bending down to her.

"Don't! don't!" said Meggie, turning away her face, "don't! I might just as well die here; I've give up!"

"Given up what, Meggie?" said Annie, as she caressed the excited child.

"I've give up everything—I sot out—I sot my foot down—I put into it—I did my best—I tried all I could, and I couldn't be good—I'm hateful—I ain't fit for anything, and I don't care what becomes of me, now—I've give up—let me alone—I've give up!"

There was a deep sorrow in these last words, that touched Annie to the heart.

"But I have not given you up. I won't give you up. The Saviour won't give you up. You are his. You are his own little lamb. He died for you, and he won't let any

one take you out of his hand. Don't you hear me, Meggie dear?" said Annie, as she took the hand that was thrust out as if in desperation.

"I can't be good—I can't be like you—I can't do as he says," said Meggie, sitting up on the ground and looking the picture of misery.

"Annie dear, we will take Meggie with us," said Mr. Ellsworth, who, even while he deeply felt for the poor child, could not forget his daughter's health. "It is too damp for you, Annie, here. We will take Meggie home, and then you can talk with her there."

Meggie let herself be lifted into the buggy, and placed on the low seat which Annie had been sure to have there for her.

"Stubby,—I can't leave him here—the poor little thing!" said Meggie, with more affection in her tones than Annie had ever before heard.

Mr. Ellsworth took the boy in his arms, and so the strange looking party set out. At

Annie's request, Meggie guided them to the new house by a shorter path than that which led by Billy Blake's hovel. There would have been silence in that well-filled vehicle, but for Stubby. His tears were now dried, and his present delight seemed equal to his past sorrow. He had no doubt that all would be well with Meggie, now that she was safe in Miss Annie's keeping, and he gave himself up to the joy of the hour.

Stubby's first drive was not an affair to be taken coolly, and he expressed his satisfaction in such odd terms that the smiles often twinkled on Mr. Ellsworth's face as he listened.

Stubby might have been a wonderful wit, then, and Annie Ellsworth would not have heard him. Her heart was too deeply engaged to note surrounding objects. In the full earnestness of a loving, trusting spirit, she was praying for wisdom to lead Meggie out of her present darkness to the clear light of the Sun of Righteousness.

Meggie was silent and gloomy; yet, as

she from time to time looked in Annie's sweet face, she seemed to catch a shadow of comfort.

When the new house was reached, Mr. Ellsworth took Stubby under his own guardianship, and was more than repaid for his trouble by the free joyousness and sturdy manliness of the little chap, who was not to be awed by any stranger.

Annie, meanwhile, had drawn Meggie into the silence and seclusion of her own quiet room. That room, where so many true prayers had been offered, seemed to Annie almost like the peculiar presence of her Lord. There he had comforted her in the midst of pain; there he had given her sweet companionship in the weary, wakeful hours of night; there he had been to her an abiding source of consolation. How she longed to make Meggie know him, as she had found him,—"full of grace and truth."

Meggie had sunk upon the low stool, and put her face between her hands. Annie sat down beside her, and said gently, "If I gave

you a piece of sewing to do, and you found you could not do it, would you be afraid to tell me so? Would you be afraid I would be harsh with you?"

"No! no, indeed! you are never hard on me!" said Meg, looking up, for once, with her usual brightness.

"If you could not learn a lesson I had given you, would you expect me to be angry with you?" continued the questioner.

"Why, Miss Annie, no! you are so patient, when I am so very dumb!" was the quick reply.

"Meggie," said Annie, very tenderly, "God loves you far better than I do. He is far more gentle and patient than I can be. He knows just what a wicked, naughty heart you have. He has watched you ever since you were a child, and he knows all the bad habits you have formed. He knows what kind of a home you have. He knows all your temptations. *He is not a hard master.* That is one mistake you have made. Nobody knows,—even you do not know as well

as God does—what a wicked heart you have —and yet he loves you. He is ready to forgive you for Jesus' sake. If you only want to be his child, and will believe that he forgives you for Jesus' sake, he will receive you. He does not expect you to be perfect. He wants poor little naughty Meggie. He wants her for his child. He wants to forgive her, and make her better, for Jesus' sake. Will you not be his, Meggie?"

"If I only could!" said Meggie, "but I can't be good!"

"Now, darling, I must tell you of another mistake you have been making. You have been trying to make yourself *fit* for heaven—*fit* for God to love. Dear child, the best man that ever lived in this world was too full of sin to be fit for God to look kindly upon. We all have to be forgiven for Jesus' sake. We are not worthy of the love of God, but he gives it to us for the sake of his dear Son. Jesus gives us his goodness for God to look at, instead of our sins. Jesus is *our* Saviour. When you feel worried and

frightened because you are so bad, think what a *perfect* Saviour we have. He was pure, and holy, and gentle, and forgiving. He never did a wrong act, he never spoke a wrong word, or thought a wrong thought. We are not fit for heaven,—but because he was so sinless, because he suffered for us, we shall be happy with him forever. Dear Meggie, if you wish to be God's child, remember he is not a hard master. He expects nothing of you but to *try* to love and serve him. If you trust in Christ, for his sake you will be forgiven. Because he was so pure and perfect, your naughtiness will be forgotten, if you love him. He is *our righteousness;* that is, he is the perfect One, whom God can look at with satisfaction, and for his sake we are God's dear children."

God gives a power to his own truth to comfort, when human aid would utterly fail. Christ, the perfect Saviour, alone can satisfy the soul that feels its sins and helplessness before God.

Not in vain, that day, did Annie Ellsworth

make known the "glad tidings" to poor Meggie, in her deep distress.

Meggie Blake was to learn the secret of a happy, Christian life. She was to know what it is to trust in Christ, who has suffered the full punishment of our sins. She was to learn, when weary of her own misdoings, to look at the perfect Jesus and be comforted. So, every failure in duty made her, while she grieved, turn more lovingly to Jesus; every shortcoming of her own made her more fully appreciate the beauty, the perfect beauty, of his character who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. They who so study their great example, and so rejoice in his holiness, must grow like him. They who, like Meggie, "hunger and thirst after righteousness," shall, in due time, be filled with the righteousness of Christ.

X.

Misgivings.

MEGGIE BLAKE was a generous child. Perhaps you wonder what she could have to give. Be sure a generous spirit will always find some way of showing itself. It is not they who have the most who give the most, or with the greatest pleasure.

While Meggie was free to range "The Pines," she would be sure to find some offering for those she loved. It was rarely that she appeared at the new house without some sign that its owners had been remembered while she had been absent from them. She knew where the blackberry vines drooped with the weight of the rich, ripe fruit. She knew where the ground was blue with the blueberries, and where the whortleberry bushes would be sprinkled with their ten thousand

black eyes. The cranberry marshes, too, were known to Meggie. These were her store-houses, whence she gathered many a basketful of treasures, that were to be all the more welcome to Annie Ellsworth, because they had been culled by the hand of love.

Then there were the wonders of "The Pines,"—the curious mosses, the stray feathers of the wild birds, the flowers that hid in the thickets and peered from the brook-sides. Meggie soon learned that in the eyes of her dear friend every new peep at Nature was a pleasure; and Meg, who had ranged the woods, full of curiosity, now began to see everywhere around her, traces of the wonderful power and love of the Almighty Creator.

Meg was on her way to the new house one morning, with a basket of bright cranberries on her arm, when she saw a buggy driving in the same direction. She knew at once that it was not the well-known vehicle of Mr. Ellsworth, and her curiosity was not a little excited at the appearance of the strangers.

She was not pleased to see them, for she feared that for that day, at least, her Miss Annie would be too much occupied with the guests to pay any attention to her little pupil.

By a short cross-cut, Meggie managed to be at the door of the new house when the strangers arrived.

A hearty welcome they received, yet in the midst of Annie's pleasure she gave Meg a bright smile that was a great help to the little girl's patience during the half-hour she had to wait before her kind friend was at liberty to speak with her.

Annie accepted the cranberries with her usual expressions of gratitude, and then said: "I shall be busy to-day, Meggie. I have some important matters on my mind, but I shall not forget you, dear, though I cannot be with you. Judge Beeker is an old friend of mine, and Dr. Wharton has had the care of me for a long, long time. I know you will be pleased to hear that the Doctor thinks I am a great deal better."

Meggie's eyes flashed with joy, as she exclaimed, "There, now! I'll go right away, now I've heard that. That is something worth hearing."

Meg did go, skipping and singing as she went, and her disappointment about her visit was lost in her pleasure at the good news that was so welcome to her.

Towards noon Meggie was with her father, among the recesses of "The Pines." He was busy at a coal-pit, and she was rendering him assistance from time to time, then scouring the woods near him, talking cheerily to herself as she bounded from stump to stump, or leaped the fallen logs.

Suddenly she heard the sound of horses' feet. "See, see, father!" she exclaimed, quickly. "See how she rides! Don't she look beautiful on a horse?"

At the moment, Mr. Ellsworth, Judge Beeker and Annie rode up to the spot where Billy was at his secret toil.

Billy Blake did not seem inclined to give them a hearty welcome, but Annie reined in

her horse at his side, and said,—"Meggie, you run on and show Mr. Ellsworth and the Judge what a good guide you are. I want to talk a little to your father."

Billy looked up in surprise, while Meg obeyed, and was placed by Mr. Ellsworth behind him on his horse. Meg would gladly have stayed, to be a listener to Miss Annie's conversation with her father. The child could not help thinking that mischief was brewing. The presence of a Judge in "The Pines" seemed to her an indication that all evil-doers were to be brought to justice. She knew too well what Billy Blake's life had been, to expect him to escape, if his doings were looked into. That was a trying ride to Meg. She had hardly gotten herself worked up into a state of anxiety about her father, when a new cause, a real cause of trouble, was presented to her mind.

It was plain from Mr. Ellsworth's way of speaking, that his stay in "The Pines" was nearly over.

Now, for the first time, it dawned upon

Meggie what it would be to her to lose Miss Annie, and her pleasant, profitable visits at the new house. Meg had been so little accustomed to take care for the future, that she had lived on in the sunshine of the presence of her friend without once thinking that there must come a time when that light would be withdrawn.

Mr. Ellsworth had almost forgotten Meg, when a low, snuffling, and subdued sob behind him, reminded him of his little companion.

"What's the matter, Meg?" You are not one of the crying kind. What ails you, child?" said Mr. Ellsworth, kindly.

"I don't want you to be 'Pine Rats,' but —but I feel so bad to think of your going away!" whimpered out poor Meg.

"Never fret yourself about that, Meggie. Your business just now is to keep cheerful, and tell us whether, if we turn round there by the brook, that path will take us back to where we left Miss Annie."

"Yes—yes, sir!" said Meg, who was try-

ing to learn to be polite. Mr. Ellsworth's words had given Meg a key to a source of consolation. She remembered a lesson Miss Annie had taught her, and determined to act upon it forthwith. Annie had said: "No one who has God for a friend has a right to be sorrowful. He sends only such troubles as we need. He can help us in all our difficulties and dangers. We have only to do what is right, and be happy, and leave all the rest to him."

Meg cheered up at once, and Mr. Ellsworth did his part to help her in keeping up her spirits. He asked her questions about "The Pines," and both the gentlemen found their faces constantly breaking into smiles at her quick, bright replies.

When Annie rejoined the little party, her face was thoughtful, and Meg saw her father walk quickly away after the interview. Again Meg's misgivings revived.

"We are going to keep you the rest of the day, Meggie," said Annie Ellsworth; "so put on your best face and show how well a

little girl brought up in 'The Pines' can behave."

Meg was well pleased at the invitation. Every minute that she could be with Miss Annie was very precious to her, now that they were so soon to part, and even to look at her seemed a privilege.

Meggie knew that she should always hear something about the most important of subjects when Annie Ellsworth mingled in the conversation. Annie had so long looked upon death as the certain end of her present disease, and on Heaven as her real home, soon to be enjoyed, that Heavenly things had for her a wonderful reality. She lived in the presence of the Saviour she loved, and of him and his cause she chiefly thought and spoke.

Death is near to all of us. Is Heaven our sure home? Let it, then, be much in our minds, and the love of its King in our hearts; so will our lips continually praise him, and our lives show that we are going to the Better Country.

Christians talking together of their hopes

and their Master, Meggie had never before heard. Now, Judge Beeker and Annie made the wayside a real walking in the narrow path, as they spoke with warm love of the forgiveness of Jesus, and of their wish to be like him,—"always doing good."

Mr. Ellsworth listened, but was silent. He was one of those unfortunate—perhaps blameworthy—followers of Christ, who seldom have his name or his teachings on their lips. Meggie listened, too, in silence, but her heart throbbed and her eyes glistened at the new joy that opened to her.

Poor Meggie had never known what it was to meet with the happy children who sing together of Jesus, and gather in glad circles round dear Sunday-school teachers, who strive to lead them all to know and love him. Meggie had never heard the welcome church bell call the friends of God to come and worship in his holy temple. She had never prayed with hundreds of Christ's followers, or heard his messenger preach the truth to the listening people.

Very precious time to Meggie was this opportunity of hearing two faithful ones speak of holy things by the way.

A dash of sorrow came in upon her joy, as she thought how soon there would be no one near her who could teach her in Heavenly things, and encourage her in her poor efforts in the upward path.

"He—he will always be near me! He, the Saviour who died for me, will never leave me nor forsake me," thought Meggie. "In Heaven I shall meet them all: that first stranger, Miss Annie,—all, all who love Jesus. There will be no sin there, and no sorrow. No sin there, no sorrow, and no more parting," repeated Meggie to herself, and her heart passed across this short life on earth, and was, for the time, glad in the coming Heaven.

XI.

An Agreement.

MEGGIE BLAKE had begun to think a Judge by no means the awesome being she had supposed, when suddenly her first terrors at the thought of his presence revived.

After dinner was over at the new house, on the day mentioned in the last chapter, Judge Beeker drew from his pocket a paper, and handed it soberly to Miss Annie, saying, "This is the necessary instrument. When will the people referred to be here,—Billy and Sally Blake. I have the names right, I believe." Meg's eyes almost started from her head, and her curiosity would certainly have prompted her to some anxious questions, but for the diversion of her thoughts at that moment. Meggie was sitting near a window,

and her quick ear caught the sound of coming footsteps.

Yes, there could be no mistaking that uncouth couple. That tall, pale, unshaven, blear-eyed, coal-marked, uncomely visitor, could be no other than Billy Blake. There was not another such a stout Amazon in "The Pines," as that hard-featured, strong-limbed woman. There could not be two Sally Blakes!

Meggie actually trembled, and shook like a leaf in the wind. In the heart, where the free forgiveness through Christ is sought and found, love must spring and grow. The parents, to whom she had once been so indifferent, had latterly become objects of interest to Meggie. In secret she had prayed much for them; in their poor home, she had striven to be to them what a daughter should be. Now it was real sorrow to her to see them, as she thought, about to fall into the hands of justice, and to meet the reward of their evil deeds.

She sprang towards them to warn them

of their danger, but Sally drove her back with a menacing look and a threat of ill-usage if she did not keep herself quiet, when "folks knew what they were about."

It was plain that the rough couple were expected at the new house. The only surprise shown at their arrival was the natural look of wonder at their strange appearance.

Miss Annie spoke to them kindly. Oh, how Meggie thanked her in her thoughts for her gentle words!

Then Judge Beeker rose, and in a formal manner, said, "It is proper that you should hear the paper read, before you put your names to it, and the thing is done."

Not one word of that reading did Meggie lose. Eager, anxious interest was on her face, as the speaker commenced,—then came surprise, pleasure, and pain, mingling by turns.

There an agreement was plainly stated—an agreement between Billy and Sally Blake, parents of a certain Meggie Blake, and Mr. Ellsworth, now present in "The Pines." By

this agreement, Meggie Blake was bound out to Mr. Ellsworth to do for him such work as he should require, that work not being too hard for the years, health and strength of said Meggie. He was to see that she was comfortably clothed and fed, and taught to read and write. He pledged himself that she should be properly cared for in case of sickness, and decently buried, if she should die. At the age of eighteen, she should receive from him a full suit of clothes, and be free to go her own way.

Billy and Sally Blake, consenting to this agreement, were to have no further claim over the time, person or movements of the said Meggie, but to give her up entirely to the care, protection and government of the said John Ellsworth, there present. In sign of which agreement, the persons making the agreement were to put their signatures, in the presence of Judge Beeker, and of Dr. Wharton, as a witness.

"Are you willing to go with me, Meggie?" said Annie, when the reading was over.

To the astonishment of all, Meggie was silent for a moment, and then she said,—

"May-be I ought to stay here—may-be, Miss Annie, I can't go!" and doubt and perplexity were in the child's face.

"May-be you'll have to," said Billy Blake, fiercely.

"None of your maybes, Billy!" broke in the wife. "You'll stay where you're put, Meggie Blake," she said, in a way that showed she was used to command.

"Ought I to, Miss Annie? may I go?" continued Meggie, still doubtful.

"We want you, dear—I think it is best," said Annie's low sweet voice.

"You will find me bad and troublesome, and wish me back in 'The Pines.' I ain't like your kind of folks. I never shall be," said Meggie.

"We love you, Meggie. We will trust you," was the earnest reply. "Will you go with us, Meggie?"

"I will! I will!" said Meggie, joyously; but her face clouded suddenly, as she turned

to her parents and said, "I wanted to have teached you to be good. I meant to be a good child to you."

"You get along!" said Sally, coarsely. "You have been uncommon, along back—you're the likeliest child I've got—but 'Pine Rats' don't get such chances every day; so stop your talk, and we'll do the thing up."

Now came the signing of the paper. Of course Meggie and her parents could by no means write their names, but they made their "marks" on the paper, instead, and thought that a wonderful literary effort, as was plain from the way they handled the pen and regarded the result of their awkward use of it. Billy Blake and his wife seemed glad to have the interview over, and hurried away as soon as the business was completed. They did not leave the new house, however, without substantial proofs of the kindness of its owners. Sally had a basketful of groceries that taxed even her strength, and Billy went off with his head in the midst of the cluster of chairs, that were given him for his home.

Annie found an opportunity to tell the rough couple how she meant to train Meggie to know and love the great God, who sees all things, and expects obedience from every human being. She promised to bring the child to see her parents, and hoped both they and she would be found living in honesty and in the fear of God.

Annie could not know whether her well-meant words were even heard by the persons to whom they were addressed. They looked as if she were speaking to them in a strange language, but she "cast her bread upon the waters," and left the result to him who had bidden her to "preach the gospel to every creature."

"My own Meggie!" said Annie, tenderly, when she returned to her room, where the little girl was sitting alone, "you have one more night to spend at home, and then you will go away with us to-morrow."

"Oh, Miss Annie, you are so kind, and I feel so happy—so full, somehow! I think the Lord means to keep me safe; but—but

—I can't bear goin' from Stubby!" and here Meggie actually cried. "Stubby's been gettin' nigher and nigher to me lately. He likes to hear about the Lord Jesus, and I kinder thought there would be one of our folks in heaven—along with me. If I go and leave him, may-be he'll go all wrong."

"Suppose we should take Stubby with us," said Annie, thoughtfully. "We might get him in at the 'Children's Home.'"

"And would they teach him, like you do me? And would I see him sometimes?" asked Meggie, eagerly.

"We shall see—we shall see!" said Annie. "I will talk with my father about it."

"To think I am goin' to belong to you!" said Meggie, with a look full of love at Annie.

"And I hope we both shall belong to our Heavenly Master," said Annie, solemnly.

"And both see him where he shines so bright," was Meggie's earnest reply.

Happy are they who, like Meggie, have an earthly mistress who yet serves a Master

in Heaven!—so both shall journey gladly onward to the end of the earthly pilgrimage;—so both shall hear the glad sentence, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

XII.

A New Home.

WILLINGLY as Sally Blake had parted with Meggie, she did not as readily spare her youngest born. Mr. Ellsworth's kind offers might have been refused, but for the vociferous cries with which Stubby declared his desire to go with Meggie, and his determination not to stay in "The Pines" without her. Sally consented at last, and Stubby's roars were succeeded by a series of awkward gambols, by which he strove to exhibit his joy at the new prospect before him.

Meggie's outward appearance had been much improved through Miss Annie's kind hints and ready assistance, but Stubby was still as remarkable a specimen of rags and dirt as could be found in "The Pines."

Mrs. Brooks put him through a cleansing

process, against which he stoutly rebelled, before she would allow him to take his place in the carriage that was to convey him from his forest home.

No country can be so full of wonders to a grown-up traveller as was the world outside "The Pines" to these children of the wilderness. Every comfortable farmhouse seemed to them a palace, and the first village they entered so filled them with astonishment, that their loud expressions of surprise drew a crowd round the carriage that was by no means agreeable to the older inmates.

A simple church, with its spire pointing upwards, seemed to Meg the crowning beauty of the village. How she longed to be among the privileged worshippers who met there to pray together, and to hear a message from the Heavenly Friend!

How many young people there are who feel it a burden to be, even once a week, for a couple of hours in God's house! Might they not learn from poor, simple, ignorant Meggie?—We will not dwell upon the de-

light of the children when they reached Mr. Ellsworth's city home. Meg admired all she saw, and was grateful for the comforts by which she was to be surrounded, but her chief joy was the prospect of leading a Christian life in a Christian family.

Stubby willingly consented to be placed at a "Children's Home," on being promised a visit to Meggie once a week. The fact was, the child felt as if he must be in a dream, where every change was pleasant, and every joy awaited him.

Meg went with her brother to his new abode. When she had heard the little children sing one of their sweet hymns, and knew that Stubby was to be trained there to the knowledge and worship of Jesus, there went up a true thanksgiving from her heart.

Annie Ellsworth had not taken charge of Meggie without "counting the cost." She well knew the patience that would be required to train for usefulness one who had been accustomed to the wild way of life of a child of "The Pines." Meggie's mistakes

were the laughing-stock of the whole house, and she soon learned that there were temptations to anger in the city, as well as in her rude forest home. Meggie was to be made to know and feel that they who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" must find out their own utter helplessness, their dependence on Christ's strength and Christ's holiness, before they can be "filled."

Annie's patience never failed, though Meg ten times a day tried her kind mistress by carelessness, as well as by odd mistakes arising from her ignorance of the requirements of her present way of life. When set to scour knives, Meg bestowed all her strength upon the handles, cutting herself with the blades in her eagerness to succeed in her efforts.

This, and a thousand other mistakes, could not discourage Annie Ellsworth, while she saw her little charge listening eagerly to the words of Scripture, and daily growing in that better knowledge which shall endure when this world passeth away.

Blundering as Meggie seemed in her ordinary household duties, which were new to her, in Miss Annie's room she was a most acceptable assistant. There love made her touch gentle, and love prompted her to guess the invalid's wants, even without an outward sign.

As the winter wore on, and Annie's strength, gained in the summer, wasted away, Meggie became more and more necessary to her comfort. The invalid did not feel her weakness when her wants were supplied without asking. It was one thing to trouble stout Mrs. Brooks to cross the room, or to descend the long flight of stairs ; it was quite another to put Meg's nimble feet in motion, and to know that every service she could render gave her real pleasure.

There were gratitude, love, admiration and confidence in Meggie's feeling towards her friend. To do the will of that friend was to her a source of joy.

Such ought to be our service of Christ. Did we but look upon him even as one hu-

man being may look upon another, with deep love and grateful trust, what a gladness would there be in every duty! what sacrifice would seem dear for his sake! And ought we not so to love him? Have we no cause of gratitude towards him who has so borne our punishment and secured our salvation?

Let us, then, "do all things without murmuring," remembering what Master we serve.

XIII.

Meggie's Birth-Place.

WHEN spring came with its gentle breezes and bright flowers, Annie Ellsworth's pale face looked forth from the windows of her sick-room. That was not a dark, sad room. There the sunlight came in freely, and there was the better light of a cheerful spirit. Annie loved the free open air, and the enjoyments of health, but she could be happy without them. She was contented to live in any way that her Heavenly Father thought best for her. While there was work for her to do on earth, she would not pine to be freed from her weak body, that she might soar away to her Heavenly Home.

Work for her Master Annie was doing in her retirement. She who had been so lovely in health could not be forgotten and forsa-

ken, even by worldly friends, when disease had laid its hand upon her. No one felt it a dreary, saddening thing, to spend an hour with Miss Annie. Every bright day was sure to bring her a throng of visitors, and she had a smile and a welcome for them all. She did not love her earthly friends the less, because she had a greater and a better friend in heaven. She was but the more anxious that the dear ones of earth should be sure of an entrance into that home of joy which was so much in her thoughts. She had her own way of winning to serious reflection those who sought her in her sick-room. Persons who had never dared to speak of the deep wish for holiness that would come upon them in solitude and in sickness, found themselves owning to Annie their craving for better things. The young and light-hearted could not refuse to read the books that Annie slipped into their hands at parting. The old in the ways of the world felt the folly and uselessness of their lives, as they saw that young, fair being so bright, while her body was fading away, and

so useful, when apparently cut off from all ordinary means of usefulness. The lesson of Annie's daily life was not lost upon Meggie. She saw the power of the love of Christ to make glad the dreaded way of death. She saw her dear friend going rejoicing down to the tomb, and more precious than ever seemed to her the Heavenly knowledge that had been sent in mercy to her once darkened spirit.

It is not alone to save men's souls, that we are bound to lead them, if possible, to the feet of Jesus. There are sorrow and care, pain and death, in store for all who live upon the earth. Ought we not to wish to guide every human being to him who can comfort us in our sorrow, relieve us of our cares, sustain us in the agony of pain, and fill us with joy in the hour of death?

As Meggie felt more and more the blessedness of a knowledge of the Saviour, and of trusting in him, she longed the more to have her own wretched family made glad through this knowledge and this trust. She did not

feel that it was impossible that the truth should reach them. She remembered her own ignorant and wicked state, and she could believe that God could change them, as he had changed her. She hoped yet to see them a Christian family, "walking to the house of God in company," and taking sweet counsel together by the way. Painful, in many respects, she knew her summer stay in "The Pines" must be, yet she longed to hear Mr. Ellsworth speak of the time for his removal, that she might be herself the messenger of good to her own home.

Great, then, was Meggie's disappointment, when Dr. Wharton declared it best for Annie to remain in the city, surrounded by the comforts of her daily life. The wise physician knew well that further efforts for the restoration of his patient would be vain, and he wanted her last days to be undisturbed by unnecessary changes and consequent inconveniences.

Meggie said nothing of her secret wishes, but Annie knew too well what it was to

yearn to lead others in the right path, not to understand Meggie's look of disappointment.

"Meggie," she said, one morning, "father is going to sell his place in 'The Pines.' He will be obliged to go there this week, with the friend who is to purchase it. They will stay several days: would you like to go with them?"

Meggie's eyes brightened. "If you could spare me, I should so like it!" was her eager reply.

"I can get on for a day or two with Mrs. Brooks, Meggie, but I could not spare my little maid very long," said Annie, fondly. "I should like to have you go, for I know you wish it."

"Indeed, I do!" said Meggie. "You are always so thoughtful and kind!"

So it was arranged that Meggie should accompany Mr. Ellsworth in his visit to "The Pines."

As the little girl passed over the road she had travelled eight months before, she realized how greatly she had changed, even in

that short space of time. The traces of civilized life were no longer new to her. She had been many times a glad worshipper in the house of God, and knew what it was to rejoice when the Sunday-school bell rang. Christ had become more dear to her, and Heaven seemed nearer to her. As they approached "The Pines," the depths of the dark forest were, to Meggie's mind, sprinkled with human beings, to whom she longed to bear the glad tidings that had given her such "great joy."

She could hardly repress her impatience, as the horse moved but slowly along the soft road, made worse than usual by recent rains.

At length they entered the winding path that led of old to Billy Blake's home. The little party were not to continue to drive on through tall pines. They came to an unexpected clearing, and sudden light broke in upon them to their extreme surprise.

The blackened ground, and the charred trunks that were still left standing, told too plainly that a stronger power than the wood-

man's axe had been among "The Pines." The devouring flames had done their swift work of destruction.

It would have been in vain to look for the site of Billy Blake's hovel, but for a sure landmark that Meggie was certain would still remain. She well remembered the "mountain" that she and her brothers had tried to build near their own door. All the stones they could gather from far and near, they had heaped up, cementing them well with a preparation of earth and water, which all children love to prepare. Year by year this mound had grown, and now it stood amid the general desolation, to mark the spot of Meggie's birth-place. Meggie knew it by no means followed, from the appearance of her late home, that evil had happened to her parents: their own hands might have kindled the flames that had so changed the scene.

Poor Meggie was bitterly grieved; not that she had anticipated so much pleasure from an interview with her unworthy par-

ents, but she had hoped that her testimony to the blessedness of the religion of Christ would win them to "think on these things." Mr. Ellsworth kindly promised to scour all that region on the following day, in search of the new abode to which Billy had betaken himself, with his family; and with this promise Meggie was obliged to content herself.

It was in vain that Mr. Ellsworth ranged with her the forest roads, and sought out the hidden dwellings of the inhabitants of "The Pines." These rude people either could not or would not give any tidings of the missing family, and the search was at length given over.

There was one source of consolation to Meggie in this real trial. She knew that the eyes of the great God could see those wanderers, wherever they might have pitched their tent. His Spirit could reach them in the darkest recesses of the forest. He who had prompted a passing stranger to stop by the wayside to whisper to poor Meggie of the sinner's only friend, could find a messen-

ger to bear the truth to the father, mother, and little ones, for whom she prayed.

Yes, for them Meggie prayed. She lifted up her heart in earnest petitions, and so she was comforted.

XIV.

Annie.

WHEN Meggie returned again to Miss Annie, it was to feel that she was more closely bound to her than ever. The circle of her duties seemed to be narrowed to the house where her kind friend was a prisoner. The world without was little to her now, save that home where her brother was so happy among his playmates. Meggie felt that she was to be a kind of mother to Stubby, and Annie encouraged her to think that some day she might take the little fellow wholly under her charge. To prepare for this responsible position, became, with Meggie, another motive for self-improvement, another inducement to walk steadily in the narrow path.

Another year went by, with but little out-

ward change to Meggie. Amid the duties of daily life, one painful thought would sometimes thrust itself upon Meggie's mind.

Annie Ellsworth spoke freely and frequently of herself as rapidly nearing her Heavenly mansion. To the invalid, this was a thought full of joy and peace. Why should she not rejoice that she was soon to see the Saviour she had long loved, and be forever in his presence?

To Meggie that prospect was still dark. It seemed to her that it would be impossible for her to live without her "Miss Annie." Meggie had hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and the Lord was to lead her in his own way to know the fulness of his truth.

Meggie knew that Annie had been growing weaker, day by day, and that a more angelic sweetness was stealing over her pale features. Meggie knew this, but she would not think of that coming parting, of which these were sure tokens.

Annie loved to have her little hand-maiden constantly near her. Not that she needed

such frequent services, but she had ever some sweet word of counsel or holy hope to breathe in Meggie's willing ear.

Annie had been placed in her easy-chair, one beautiful spring morning. She had admired the hyacinths that were opening in the glasses by the window. She had noted the budding elms before the door, and welcomed the blue-birds that were singing among the bare branches. She had seemed so human, so full of life and love, that Meggie could not think that she could die.

Annie's hand beckoned Meggie to her side. "Go, darling," she said, "call my father; and our clergyman, too, dear—I should like to have him sent for."

Meggie obeyed. She understood too well the meaning of that summons, and her heart shrank from the horrors that she thought about to be revealed to her eyes. She shrank from the agony she believed in store for her.

The fond father was almost instantly at his daughter's side. He found her calm and

peaceful. She had but to whisper to him of her joy in the felt presence of her Saviour, and to thank him for all his care and ceaseless love.

"I am going now, father," she said, "and all is peace. Meggie will take care of you as I would, if I had lived.—Meggie, dear, I am only leaving you for a little while. We shall soon meet again, in the better country."

Meggie's tears flowed fast, but she kept her eyes fixed on the calm, sweet face before her; she would not lose one glimpse of it while it was still lighted by the spirit within.

The clergyman came. His voice of prayer sounded through that quiet room. Annie's head was on her father's shoulder, and her eyes were raised to Heaven.

"Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace, both now and evermore. Amen." So spoke the clergyman.

"Peace, both now and evermore," murmured Annie, and, with these words on her lips, she ceased to hear the voice of earthly prayer, and awoke to the sound of angels rejoicing, and welcoming her to the Eternal Home.

The head that drooped on the father's shoulder would never more be raised; the hand that lay in his was still with the stillness of death.

In the light of her Redeemer's countenance Annie's glorified spirit was glad. She would know no more sorrow, or sickness, or sin. Hers was peace—peace and joy forevermore.

Where were the tears that Meggie expected would flow? Where was the agony that she thought would wring her young heart? Was this quiet passing away the death-bed scene she had dreaded?

The Lord who had taken his dear servant unto himself, would not leave the mourners comfortless.

Death had lost its terrors now and forever to Meggie. Falling asleep in Jesus,—ah!

this is a different thing from death without hope. What was there to fear in being committed to "God's gracious mercy and protection?" Such a death was surely better than the most blessed life without hope.

Meggie knelt down, and oh, how she prayed that she might live the life of the righteous, and that her last end might be like his! Well she understood now that they who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ have nought to fear. He who has died for them will keep them "under the shadow of his wing," and redeem them from the power of the grave.

"When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, the Lord will take thee up." As earthly friends depart, God shows himself a nearer, a better Friend than ever before.

There was a sweet calm in Meggie's heart as she looked on the pale, still face that had beamed so lovingly on her. She would not have called back to earth the purified spirit that was now rejoicing in the world above.

Meggie was not lonely; she was but parted

but a little while from her dear friend. They were, even now, both in the presence of the same Saviour. That Saviour who could make the saint happy in heaven, could as well cheer and make glad the earthly pathway of poor little Meggie.

Meggie knew and felt this truth in her inmost heart. She was enjoying the "blessedness of them that mourn." Only those to whom God has sent sorrow know what it is to be "comforted" by him.

The twining arm of earthly love is precious, the sympathizing voice of friendship is dear, but what are these in comparison with the "comfort" which the God of love can pour into the hearts of the afflicted.

"Blessed are they which mourn, for they shall be comforted." Fear not the hour of sorrow, for then only can you learn to know the unspeakable tenderness of the Heavenly Friend. Then only can you be filled with such "comfort" as is better than this world's joy.

Fear not the hour of death, ye little ones

who have trusted in Christ Jesus! When earth fades from your eyes, you shall begin to see the glories of heaven. When the voices of friends sound faintly in your ears, you shall begin to hear the welcoming songs of angels. When you are parting from the dear ones of earth, you will be going to his arms, who hath loved you with an everlasting love and hath wrought out for you an eternal salvation.

XV.

A Sister's Care.

HAD Meggie a sad home now? Was Mr. Ellsworth sorrowful and stern, that old man without a child to comfort him? When his son had been taken from him in his pride, Mr. Ellsworth had grown more cold and indifferent to the world without; had the death of his precious daughter driven him to a closer seclusion, and to more gloomy meditations?

Annie's departure was a loss that made him rich. Not until her life was closed, was the example of that life fully felt; not until then were her prayers fully answered. Mr. Ellsworth awoke as from a dream: now he seemed to understand, for the first time, what it is to be a follower of him who "went about doing good."

Sixty years full of blessings Mr. Ellsworth could count; but what had he done for his Lord and Master? Mr. Ellsworth answered this question in deep repentance and humility of heart. Declaring himself "an unprofitable servant," he resolved henceforward to be a faithful laborer in his Master's vineyard. He would spend the few remaining years of his life in such active benevolence, as should show his deep regret for his past inexcusable idleness. Meggie had lost a tender, loving mistress; but she had still a wise and gentle master. It was pleasant to see the old man striving to speak kindly to the humblest poor, and giving his interest where he gave his money. Of Meggie he was ever thoughtful. He felt her a sacred trust, left him by his precious child. It was his part, not only to know that she was trained by Mrs. Brooks to a full knowledge and skilful practice of domestic duties; he was not only to see that she had a good plain education; but he must watch over her soul, as one "who must give an account." With the modesty of one who

undertakes a new office, he commenced her religious instruction; and old man and little child together knelt to ask the presence of the Saviour, while his words was studied and his commandments were explained.

In her sorrow and her new employments, did Meggie forget her brother? No, indeed! That little brother was a perfect treasure to Meggie. His regular Saturday afternoon visits were looked forward to with eagerness, and welcomed with joy.

Stubby had shown a quickness in learning that had made him a favorite with his teacher, and his noble spirit made him the pet of his companions.

Catechism and Scripture stories he had at his tongue's end, and he could sing hymns without number. Meggie praised him for his industry, and was glad that he was storing away such good things, and yet she was not satisfied. There was something yet wanting in Stubby, before he could be such a brother as Meggie prayed that she might have.

She had learned that it was quite possible

that the boy who was so trained in the Scriptures, should yet fail as utterly of an entrance into Heaven, as if he had been left in the ignorance of the children of "The Pines."

It is not a mere head-knowledge of God's word that is the blessing above all others to be wished: that knowledge must find its way to the heart, and work love to God and man, or it brings the greater condemnation.

Vain are the perfect Sunday-school lessons, vain are the rewards and the praise of the teacher to that scholar who has not yet learned to pray in sincerity, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me."

Such a prayer had never gone up from Stubby's lips. Meggie knew it by the light and careless way in which he could speak holy words; she knew it by his cold, indifferent manner, when she talked to him of the love of Jesus; she knew it certainly by the little effort he made to govern his temper, and to be gentle, kind, and truthful. Meggie felt for her little brother almost a mother's loving interest. His very misfortune made

him the dearer to her. Those deformed feet, that were the laughing-stock of the boys at the Home, made his sister but the more tender in her manner towards him, and the more anxious that he should learn to think little of the body, and to know the preciousness of his soul, which was to live forever.

By gentle persuasion and kind warning Meggie tried to lead her little brother in the right path. He listened to her, but it was to smile when she had done, and to show too plainly, that he had not received the good seed in his heart. Months and even years went by, yet Meggie continued her faithful teaching, without any seeming effect. The droll, frolicksome child, who was placed at the Home, had become a sturdy, wilful boy, who too often refused to submit to the authority of the matron who had charge of the establishment.

Stubby had more than once been detected in high-handed mischief, and Meggie daily trembled lest he should be led into still greater sin.

The sister was thrown into a state of anxiety, one morning, by the unexpected visit of the matron, and several ladies who were directors of the institution where Stubby had been placed. They inquired for Mr. Ellsworth, and Meggie, of course, had no excuse for remaining in the room. She had only an opportunity for an eager inquiry after her brother's health, and, being assured that he was perfectly well in body, she was left to conjecture the evil that might have led astray his soul.

Mr. Ellsworth did not leave Meggie long in suspense. After the conference was over, he stated immediately to her the subject about which he had been consulted.

It had been decided that it would not be for Stubby's advantage to be any longer under the charge of a woman. A farmer, going west, had applied at the Home for a boy to take with him, and Stubby had been selected as one of the most hardy of the children, as well as one needing active labor and the strong hand of discipline.

Meggie could have cheerfully parted with her brother for his good, if she had known that he was guided by right principles; but to see him go from her, to sink perhaps lower and lower in sin, was a sore trial. After much thought and prayer she resolved in her last interview to make a stronger and greater effort than ever before, to lead him to begin a new life. Side by side the brother and sister sat, on the day of the parting. Meggie's arm was thrown around her brother, and she looked at him with deep, yearning affection.

Stubby, meanwhile, seemed wholly occupied with thrusting his fat hands into the various pockets in the new suit of clothes that had been provided for him for the occasion.

"Brother," said Meggie, tenderly, "I have a present for you, that I want you always to keep with you. I bought it with the first half-dollar Miss Annie gave me. You know I used to wear it round my neck on a string. She told me to keep it until I could do some real good with it. Now I have bought you a

little Bible. See! your own name is in it. Won't you read in it every day?"

"May-be!" said Stubby, taking the book, but not looking at his sister.

"I shall miss you so, Stubby," continued Meggie, "but I won't mind that, if you will promise to ask the Lord every day to bless you, and to help you to love him. Won't you do that, dear?"

Stubby kicked his stumpy little feet against the floor, and was silent.

"May-be I sha'n't live to see you again, and I do so want to meet you in heaven," said Meggie, earnestly.

"You look pretty hearty," said Stubby, giving Meg's round cheeks a brotherly pinch; "you don't look like going off in a hurry!"

Meggie felt like giving up in despair, but she said, "Dear Stubby, I shall pray for you every day, and perhaps when you are far away from me, you will remember what I have so often said to you, and the Lord will lead you to him. I believe the Saviour will not let you go to ruin. My own dear brother

will not go down to the wicked, wicked place, to be in torment forever."

Meggie spoke so solemnly that Stubby could not smile.

He rose up suddenly, and said, "Well, Meg, I must bid you good-bye. You had better not read the newspapers, or you may see an account of my coming to some bad end, as you think so ill of me."

Meggie's eyes were full of tears, as her brother submitted to her kissing him, and then walked away, whistling as he went.

Ah, the pride of a boy's heart! Stubby was whistling to keep up his own courage, and to hide his own grief at parting with the sister who loved him so dearly. Rough, contrary, and wilful was Stubby Blake, but he had not yet lost all true affectionate feeling, unwilling as he was to give it any outward expression.

Meggie would have given much to have seen the tear that the stout boy brushed away when he was out of sight. Meggie was disappointed, but not utterly dishearten-

ed. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and he turneth it whithersoever he will;" so speaks the Scripture, and Meggie knew that there was a power which could bring her brother to repentance, and give him the hunger and thirst for righteousness that would certainly be satisfied.

Meggie betook herself to prayer,—such prayer as every sister should offer for a brother who is a stranger to Jesus—such prayer as never faileth to reach the ears of the Heavenly King.

XVI.

A Letter.

CHILDREN who have learned to read, almost without knowing how or when, cannot think what a treasure all Meggie's knowledge of books seemed to her. It was a daily subject of thankfulness with her, that she could open her Bible and enjoy it, with no human eye to look upon her. All the weary spelling lessons through which she had passed were more than made up for by one precious chapter in the best of books.

Meggie's ability to write had not hitherto been of much service to her. She had taken pains to learn because it was Miss Annie's wish, and many a long morning she had passed at the invalid's side, making rude letters on the slate, and training her unsteady hand to obedience.

Now it was a joy to Meggie to know that, however distant her brother might be, her sisterly words could reach him. She resolved to write to him every week, and while she made her letters as interesting as she could, not to let one go from her without some Christian advice and much prayer.

As to having any answers to these letters Meggie was quite uncertain, Stubby having utterly refused to promise to write at all,—saying, in his blunt way, that he should have nothing to say if he was well, and if he was sick somebody else would let his sister know. Meggie was therefore agreeably surprised to receive, one morning, a letter,—from her brother, of course; she could have no other correspondent.

Stubby gave a droll account of his journey, and his arrival at his western home. He declared it was a pleasure to him to be where he could see more than a dozen trees at once, and could breathe without taking in the smoke of a hundred chimneys.

It was encouraging that he should have

written at all, and the tone of the letter was cheerful; but of any expression of affection, or of interest in matters beyond this world, there was not a sign.

Stubby continued a good correspondent for several years, and Meggie's letters went off as regularly as the Saturdays came,—letters full of love and whispers of kind advice that ought to have touched any brother's heart.

At last came a long, long silence. Meggie kept on writing, trembling and praying as she took up the pen. The brother whom she was addressing might be far beyond the reach of human love, in the world of despair; yet, while there was a chance of his being yet alive, he should know that his sister was still full of affection for him—still hoping to hear of his turning his face Heavenward.

Months had passed without one word from Stubby, when the following letter was placed in Meggie's hands. She knew well the writing, and her grateful thanks ascended to Heaven while she broke the seal. Her

brother was yet in the land of the living, and there was hope for his soul.

"DEAR MEG:—

"I have been clear down,—so bad I don't care to tell you about it. I've had my own way, and got tired of it. My master has put up with more than ought to have been expected of any living man. I've been wild as a colt, contrary as a mule; a dog—a pig is better than I have been.

"I ain't much to speak of now. It's hard learning to 'walk Spanish' when you have been jigging it any way you pleased.

"I've thought of you a heap, but couldn't make up my mind to tell you what a scamp I'd got to be, and wouldn't pretend I was any better. I've turned straight round now, and mean to stump it along the best way I can. I don't know why I hate to say right out what's in me, but somehow I do. But it's just this way: I've got at my Bible; I've got on to my knees; I read over your letters, and kinder think you are praying for

me. I ain't fit to be called any good name, and shouldn't dare to think any body in this world would make up with me if I had treated them so bad; but, Meg, I do believe the Lord Jesus has forgiven me, and I sing right out loud when I think of it, I am so glad! I know you'll be glad, too, when you read this. I can just see how you'll look.

"Good-bye, Meggie. May-be we'll meet in the good place, as you said when we parted. I was real hateful to you then, but I'm sorry enough now. Write to me, and pray for me. Your brother,

"STUBBY BLAKE."

Joy, deep joy filled Meggie's heart as she read this letter. Such joy every faithful sister shall know. A loving, prayerful, consistent Christian sister may expect to have a repentant, grateful, humble brother, even though he may first wander far in the ways of sin.

The answer to prayer may be long delayed, but it will surely come. Persevere! Persevere!

XVII.

Conclusion.

TWELVE years had passed since little Meggie Blake had left her home in "The Pines."

It was towards evening, and a train of cars had just arrived at a country depot. Across a wide plain, a couple of miles from the railroad, white houses were twinkling among the green trees, and tall spires were surely marking the spot where a thriving village had sprung up by the side of a broad river.

"Are you going to walk up?" said the pleasant voice of a tall, stout lad to an older stranger, who was moving in the same direction with himself.

"Yes, and shall be glad of company," was the prompt reply.

The two walked on together, chatting about the weather, the state of the crops, and subjects of the like kind, that are interesting to everybody.

It is wonderful how differently the same things may be talked about by different people. It was plain that the older man was a grumbler. He complained of the late rains and the recent mud, dreaded a poor harvest, and was sure that the present state of politics promised the ruin of the country.

The young stranger, however, seemed of quite a different way of thinking. He saw a blessing in the plentiful showers, laughed at the bad walking, and seemed firmly to believe the Providential hand would keep his dear native country from destruction.

"What part of the town are you going to?" said the older man, as they came to a fork in the road.

"I am going to Joseph Knight's. He is a shoemaker in Heathfield—perhaps you know him?" was the reply.

"Well, now, I guess I do; and I know

what he's got—the best wife in the village," said the grumbler, at once changing his tone.

"I am glad to hear it," said the lad, cordially.

"Then you know him?" was the inquiring response.

"Not exactly. I haven't ever met him," said the young stranger.

"Well, you've got a real good fellow to know; but his wife takes the shine right off from him. She's the tidiest, smartest, kindest, best woman in Heathfield. She's got a tender feeling for the poor that beats everything. Nobody seems to be too dirty or too ragged for her to care for; and as for the coal-men, she always gives them a dinner. I call that doing the thing handsomely."

A smile and a half shadow passed over the young man's face, and he was silent.

The speaker went on: "Talk about Christians! Mrs. Knight is one, and no mistake. You never see her cross or snappish. She never frets, and gets contrary. As you see her to-day, you find her to-morrow—

pleasant and friendly, ready to do her part for anybody who needs a helping hand. I'd be a Christian myself, if I could have the good luck to be like her."

"It can hardly be called luck, since there is promise of strength to all who faithfully strive to do right," said the young man, soberly.

"Now that sounds like Mrs. Knight herself! She always has a word like that for me. Yet I love to go there, and reckon it makes me better, too. No cup of tea ever suits me as well as that I get at Mrs. Knight's, and her bread and butter is better than anybody else's cake. Everybody in Heathfield loves her, and well they may."

"Well they may!" was the earnest reply. Why, the young stranger's eyes were actually full of tears!

"There, the first house below the corner is Mrs. Knight's," said the older man, with a wondering look.

The young stranger thanked his companion courteously, and then moved rapidly

away at a peculiar pace. He was club-footed, but that did not seem to have made him any the less cheerful, or to have changed the expression of his frank, kindly face. He doubtless remembered that all peculiarities of body or mind are given according to the will of Heaven, and are to be received without murmuring. Happy they who have learned this lesson! No outward defect can interfere with our happiness, if we seek that inward peace which springs from the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus.

It was summer, and the low windows of Mrs. Knight's simple dwelling were open. She heard that peculiar step. Why did she start and color, and hasten to the door?

Why? but to welcome the brother who was so dear to her!

She could not be quite happy in a home of her own, till she had with her the only one left to her of her family.

She had sent for him to share her comforts, and join her husband in his labors. There was joy that evening in that humble

home. When Joseph Knight knelt for family worship, it was to thank the Heavenly Friend who had brought under his roof one so dear to his true wife, and to whom he wished to be a faithful brother. Earnestly he prayed that the young stranger now taken into his care might be enabled to resist temptation, and grow strong in the truth.

Then came the evening hymn. With the voice of the honest shoemaker, the son of Christian parents, rose the voices of the ransomed children of "The Pines." Perhaps Annie Ellsworth, among the angel throng, heard that music floating upwards to the Heavenly presence, and owned it an added joy, even in the midst of the bliss of the redeemed. Perhaps her father, now at her side, shared in that angelic pleasure.

Meggie Blake had not in vain "hungered and thirsted after righteousness." Now she was numbered with the true people of God, baptized in his name, and privileged to take the holy bread and wine in remembrance of

the death of her Saviour. Her faithful Christian example won glory and praise for her Divine Master. The scoffer and the doubter were silenced by the argument of her loving, consistent life. Few knew her early history. Only her husband understood her deep tenderness towards the most ignorant and degraded of earth. Such, Meggie felt, she must have been but for the hand stretched out to save her. Such might still be her father and mother, her brother and sisters. She might never have the joy of ministering to their needs, or leading them to the fountain of forgiveness, but she would labor for all who, like them, had gone far astray.

Like her Divine Master, she would "seek them that were lost," and, while hating the sin, love the poor sinner. The wicked of earth were to her but as relatives less favored than herself; she would try to meet them with Christ-like love, and, while providing for their bodies, care for their priceless souls.

They who lead such a life must be the centre of a wide-spreading circle of love, and only know in heaven the abundant harvest of the good seed they have ceaselessly sown.

We are all, like little Meggie, born with hearts of sin, and only drawn to better things by the mercy and love of Christ. Shall we not see everywhere around us, in the ignorant and bad, our relatives, such as we might have been but for the outstretched hand of love? Shall we not seek the lost, and guide the sinful in the right way?

Let us hunger and thirst after righteousness; so shall we be filled with the righteousness of Christ, and grow in his likeness. Then shall we gladly lead upward all who will hear our persuasive voice; then shall we seek Christ's poor, and Christ's little ones, and guide them into the Heavenly Kingdom.

In that Kingdom we shall walk in the white robes that have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. There we shall hunger

and thirst no more for righteousness, for sin will not tempt us, nor corruption lead us astray. There we shall dwell in the fulness of everlasting perfection and joy, in the presence of the eternal God, our Saviour.